

THE GALLANT STAND: AN ANALYSIS OF THE UNION ARMY OF THE BORDER'S
USE OF MISSION COMMAND AT THE BATTLE OF THE LITTLE BLUE,
21 OCTOBER 1864

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Military History

by

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ABSTRACT

THE GALLANT STAND: AN ANALYSIS OF THE UNION ARMY OF THE BORDER'S USE OF MISSION COMMAND AT THE BATTLE OF THE LITTLE BLUE, 21 OCTOBER 1864, by MAJ Donald David Lovett, 102 pages.

Confederate Major General Sterling Price's Missouri Raid of 1864 ended in defeat at the battle of Westport on 21-23 October 1864. That outcome was partially engineered by the Union chain of command's actions during the first day of fighting along the Little Blue River east of Independence, Missouri. Federal leaders assumed risk to allow their subordinates to exercise disciplined initiative and adapt to developing combat situations, applying principles of the Mission Command philosophy that day. Due to the Mission Command philosophy that the Union leadership collectively exhibited, a small Union cavalry force delayed Price's Confederate Army of Missouri for an entire day. That delay was critical because it allowed the Union Army of the Border to the west time to consolidate and additionally allowed the Union Provisional Cavalry Division coming from the east to catch the rear of Price's column. The subsequent days of battle on 22 and 23 October at Westport, Missouri, resulted in a decisive Union victory and the retreat of the Confederate army. The Union leadership's use of the philosophy of Mission Command at the battle of the Little Blue River contributed to decisive victory at the Battle of Westport. It provides an excellent case study in the proper use of Mission Command.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The American Civil War in the Trans-Mississippi Theater is rarely highlighted when critical events of 1864 are discussed. However, late that year, the largest Confederate invasion of Missouri took place, which culminated at the Battle of Westport on 21-23 October 1864. While not a decisive campaign, in regards to the broader conclusion of the war, this campaign can teach us critical lessons about leadership. The first day of that action contributed to the decisive outcome of the battle because of the courageous actions of a small group of Union Soldiers on the banks of the Little Blue River east of Independence, Missouri. The leaders of this small force from the Union Army of the Border demonstrated the philosophy of Mission Command in delaying a Confederate army three times their size for an entire day. In order to understand these events, it is critical to first look at the background of “Price’s Raid” of 1864, understand the details of the first day of the fighting at the Little Blue, and understand what Mission Command is as a leadership philosophy. After looking at these elements, it is apparent that the Union leadership’s use of the philosophy of Mission Command at the Battle of the Little Blue River contributed to decisive victory at the Battle of Westport two days later.

Confederate Major General Sterling Price led an ambitious expedition into Missouri in the late summer of 1864. After marching his army from Arkansas into southeast Missouri, it attacked a small Union fort near Pilot Knob, Missouri. Price ordered an assault that proved poorly executed and costly, both in men and morale. The fort was evacuated by the Union garrison, giving Price a pyrrhic victory. Pilot Knob

negatively influenced Price's mentality as an army commander for the remainder of the campaign. He slowly moved his army north toward his initial objective of St Louis but decided against an attack, likely due to fresh memories of the costly assault on Pilot Knob and his fear that he was outnumbered. Price decided to move west along the Missouri River and head toward Jefferson City, the Missouri state capital.¹

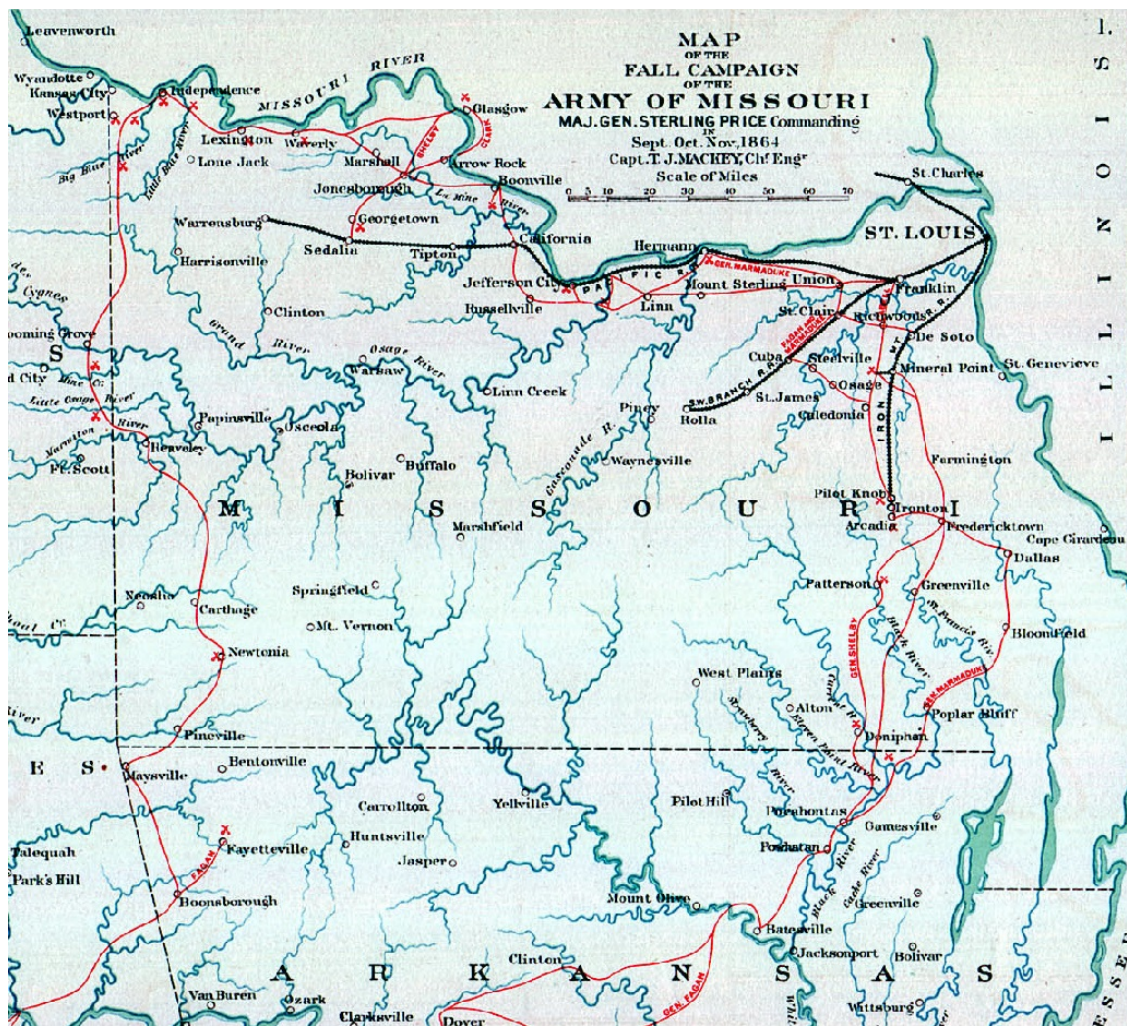


Figure 1. Price's Raid of 1864

Source: United States War Department, *Atlas to Accompany the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC: Government Print Official, 1891-1895), Plate 47.

As Price's army moved across the state the Union response was somewhat slow. The Union Commander of the Department of Missouri, Major General William S. Rosecrans, eventually cobbled together both an infantry and cavalry division to pursue Price. Major General Alfred S. Pleasonton was given command of the cavalry division and began a rapid pursuit. Meanwhile in the Department of Kansas, Major General Samuel Curtis prepared his district for possible Confederate invasion by convincing the Kansas Governor to call out the state militia.²

During his movement west, Price destroyed a few Union rail lines, took supplies, and wrought general havoc while he moved across Missouri. In the process, his army accumulated a massive train of over 500 wagons to transport the "spoils of war." Although the state of Missouri failed to rally to the Confederate cause in the numbers Price hoped for, numerous volunteers joined his ranks from the "Little Dixie" region of the state. Upon reaching Lexington, Price declined to attack the fortified Union positions that surrounded the city. Instead, he decided to continue to move west toward Kansas in an effort to continue to disrupt Union supply lines.³

After great difficulty, Curtis organized the Kansas militia as well as his few regular volunteers and crossed the border into Missouri to confront Price. Political issues within the Kansas militia caused Curtis to stop the eastward movement of the bulk of the Federal Army of the Border along the Big Blue River east of Kansas City. This is where he decided to create a defensive line to stop Price's movement west toward Kansas. Curtis sent his veteran troops with his most talented subordinate division commander, Brigadier General James Blunt, forward to Lexington, Missouri, in an attempt to locate Price's army as it moved west.⁴

On 19 October, Blunt encountered the lead elements of Price's army at Lexington and retreated west to the Little Blue River, approximately twelve miles east of the Big Blue River. Curtis ordered Blunt to leave a small element under Colonel Thomas Moonlight to defend the river crossing area and return the bulk of his command to Independence. On 21 October, Price's army arrived on the banks of the Little Blue and fought aggressively to force a crossing of the river. Price, though, had to get his large wagon train across the river before his army was caught from the east by Pleasonton's pursuing army.⁵

Moonlight adapted to the Confederate attack and utilized his initiative to hold Price's advance in check. After several hours of successful delay, Moonlight's small regiment grudgingly gave ground in the face of superior numbers, when Blunt returned to help stop the Confederate advance. Blunt and Moonlight, under the direction of Curtis delayed the advance of Price's army an entire day with a force outnumbered almost three to one. During the delay, Curtis and his men slowly withdrew toward the Big Blue defensive line. Due to this delay, Pleasonton's division was able to move within striking distance of Price's rear to the east.

The final two days of the Battle of Westport were essentially an attempt to trap Price's army between two Union forces. Curtis attempted to delay Price from the west while Pleasonton violently assaulted the Confederate rear from the east. This favorable Union situation was the direct result of the stand on the Little Blue the previous day. In the end, Price's army broke under the pressure applied by both Union forces and retreated rapidly southward along the Kansas-Missouri border back to Arkansas. The result of the battle at Westport was a decisive Union victory. It ended meaningful Confederate

offensives west of the Mississippi for the remainder of the war. This victory was enabled by Union leadership at the Little Blue acting in ways consistent with the modern principles of the Mission Command philosophy.

In order to understand the Mission Command philosophy's utilization at the Battle of the Little Blue, it is first necessary to discuss the basic overview of this US Army leadership philosophy. The US Army established the Mission Command Philosophy of Command as a foundation of Unified Land Operations.⁶ The Mission Command philosophy helps commanders deal with the uncertainty of operations by reducing the amount of certainty needed to act. Commanders understand that some decisions must be made quickly and are better made at the point of action.⁷

Mission Command philosophy is the "exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders to enable disciplined initiative within the commander's intent, to empower agile and adaptive leaders in the conduct of Unified Land Operations."⁸ There are multiple principles of Mission Command. The principles best demonstrated by the Union leadership at the battle of the Little Blue were mutual trust, disciplined initiative, and leaders accepting prudent risk.

Repeatedly during the battle of the Little Blue, the Army of the Border commander, Curtis, demonstrated trust in his subordinates, allowing them to exercise disciplined initiative within his intent. In doing so, he also assumed risk while enabling his subordinates' freedom of action to do what was necessary. Blunt also demonstrated trust and accepted prudent risk in empowering his subordinate, Colonel Thomas Moonlight. Moonlight exercised initiative in making a decisive decision to modify his

objectives at critical points to meet the broader intent of both of his commanders, an excellent example of disciplined initiative.

The lessons of Mission Command are exceptionally applicable to the Army leaders of today. History may not repeat itself, but it does provide insight into positive and negative examples that leaders can learn from. Mission Command is most effective when it empowers subordinate leaders to make decisions. In order to allow subordinates to make these critical decisions in combat, senior leaders must trust them enough to assume risk in allowing them to make decisions without direct reference to higher authorities. The events on the Little Blue will provide positive examples in Mission Command and will demonstrate how this is done effectively during difficult combat situations. The Battle of the Little Blue was a significant event that contributed to success at the Battle of Westport, which ended Price's Raid of 1864. The events of that first day were critical to the decisive Union success.

Subsequent chapters will discuss the background to Price's Raid, and provide a detailed historical account of what transpired on the Little Blue. This will be followed by an overview of the aftermath of those events, and how they influenced the Battle of Westport as well as the subsequent destruction of Price's army. It will illustrate how the Union leadership's use of Mission Command at the Little Blue contributed to Union victory. In the conclusion, it will be further demonstrated how the examples of Mission Command at the Little Blue are applicable to the leaders of today.

¹ Mark A. Lause, *Price's Lost Campaign, the 1864 Invasion of Missouri* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2011), 2-3.

² Ibid.

³ Howard N. Monnett, *Action Before Westport 1864*, rev. ed. (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 1995), 12; Lause, *Price's Lost Campaign*, 26.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ United States War Department, "General Curtis's Report, January 1865," in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (hereafter referred to as OR) 70 Volumes in 128 Parts (Washington, DC: Government Print Official, 1893), 41, Part 1, 476.

⁶ Headquarters, Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-0, *Unified Land Operations* (Washington DC: United States Army, October 2011), 1.

⁷ Headquarters, Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington DC: United States Army, September 2012), 2-1.

⁸ Ibid., Figure 1-1, iv.

CHAPTER 2

PRICE'S RAID

To understand the events that unfolded on the Little Blue River in western Missouri on 21 October 1864, it is necessary to summarize the critical events of the campaign that culminated at the Battle of Westport. This entails understanding Confederate Major General Sterling Price and the nature of his invasion/raid into Missouri, as well as some of the critical events that led to the Battle of Westport. Additionally, it is vital to understand the Union Army's response to the raid, to include political complications involved in raising militia in Kansas to meet the threat. Finally, it is important to understand Federal Major General Samuel R. Curtis, the situation he faced, and how he and his subordinates set in motion the events that eventually culminated in Union victory.

By the summer of 1864, the Civil War was going very poorly for the Confederacy. Despite large Union armies being bogged down in siege warfare around Richmond and Atlanta, the conflict was still grinding bloodily onward. The previous summer the South met with defeat at their "high water mark" with decisive, if not crippling, defeats at Gettysburg, and Vicksburg, on 3-4 July. By the fall of 1864, the Confederate government hoped to protract the conflict long enough to break the North's will to continue to fight. If the war did not appear to be winnable on the battlefield, President Abraham Lincoln's opposition might win the 1864 Presidential election and come to the peace table. In an effort to secure victories and increase discontent amongst the North's populace, the Confederate government was ready to pursue aggressive tactics.¹

The Confederacy launched three raids in 1864. General Robert E. Lee sent Lieutenant General Jubal Early on a risky venture to keep the Shenandoah Valley secure and eventually make a brazen attack on Washington DC. Major General Nathan B. Forrest wreaked havoc in northern Mississippi and western Tennessee to disrupt operations in Major General William T. Sherman's rear. In the Trans-Mississippi region, Major General Sterling Price launched a raid (or invasion) into Missouri in the late summer. Price's goal was to rally Confederate sympathizers to the cause, destroy or capture as many Union goods as possible, and establish a pro-Confederate Missouri Government. To contend with Price's invasion, the Federal Departments of Kansas and Missouri scrambled to meet this threat.²

Missouri was a prime target, as the region had not seen major fighting since the early years of the war. In the time since the Battle of Pea Ridge, Arkansas, on 7-8 March 1862, fighting in Missouri was limited to guerilla war, small actions, and continuation of blood feuds that started in "Bleeding Kansas" before the war. Missouri and Kansas Federal militia took over the policing action, and main Union military forces were shifted east of the Mississippi or south into Arkansas.³ Other than guerrillas, only a few small Confederate cavalry raids disturbed the state, validating the Federal strategy to that point. Many Confederate officers, as well as those that considered themselves the rightful government of Missouri, held the belief that Missouri could still join the Confederacy. Many of those individuals petitioned the commander of the Trans-Mississippi Department, Lieutenant General Kirby Smith, as well as the Confederate government to authorize an expedition into Missouri. Tactically speaking, this seemed to be a rational proposal due to the success of some previous smaller raids into the region. Returning

home to Missouri and turning it to the Confederacy were always on the minds of several Trans-Mississippi Confederate Generals, especially Sterling Price.⁴ Price suggested the time might be right in a letter to Smith on 8 March 1864, where he stated his belief that a move into Missouri might garner recruits in “the thousands and tens of thousands.”⁵

Price was a Mexican War veteran and former Missouri governor. He was very popular with the men who served under him, especially those from Missouri, who affectionately called him “Pap.” He was a charismatic figure, with the physical size and stature of a model leader, as well as a native of the “Little Dixie” region of Missouri. Price was the leader of the Missouri State Guard, which was pro-Confederate in nature, that violently opposed the pro-Union factions within the state. Price’s early successes at Wilson’s Creek and Lexington, won over his soldiers’ affection, but he enjoyed little additional success as the war progressed. 55 years old at the start of his invasion of Missouri, he little resembled the man he once was, weighing over 300 pounds. Due to this, he was unable to ride a horse for significant periods, having to move mostly by carriage. Despite his physical limitations, Price was supremely confident that a large amount of sympathy for the cause existed in Missouri and would translate into a large number of recruits.⁶

Confederate President Jefferson Davis and Lieutenant General Kirby Smith exchanged messages about the idea of a Missouri expedition as well as having Price lead it. Smith did not have a high opinion of Price and said as much in a letter to Jefferson Davis on 5 May 1864, but added that his popularity in Missouri would add a “strong element of success.”⁷ Despite these misgivings, in his report to Davis on 21 August, Smith mentioned sending his cavalry force into Missouri to possibly threaten St. Louis.⁸

It is unclear if this was in response to a previous order from President Davis or if Smith sent Price north on his own initiative. Regardless, Smith's order to Price on 4 August 1864, started in a very stern tone, reminding him to restrain his men from acts of destruction, reiterating that this expedition represented a "just and holy cause." Also, in addition to raising recruits, Smith set Price's primary objective as St Louis, but added that if he were unable to take it, he should move across the state then south through Kansas and Indian Territory collecting all the livestock and military goods that he could capture.⁹

This expedition included the entire cavalry wing of the Army of Arkansas. Price's initial force departed Camden, Arkansas, on 28 August, and after consolidating the wings of his Army, it was re-organized into the 3 division Army of Missouri on 16 September 1864. (See Appendix A) Upon crossing into Missouri, Price reported nearly 12,000 men, of which only 8,000 had arms. This was a very significant force and was the largest threat to Union dominance of Missouri in over two years.¹⁰

Many logistical issues plagued Price's Army of the Missouri. Although he did not receive as many recruits in Missouri as he hoped, Price did pick up a decent number of volunteers. These often came with some form of weapon, as this was a violent region. However, these weapons usually did not have a standardized type of ammunition or were not reliable enough to be considered proper for conventional military operations. In addition to the logistical challenges of ammunition and subsistence, Price was short on horses. Large numbers of his new recruits did not have horses. Having so large a force of dismounted troopers obviously diminished the speed of Price's force dramatically; later a large baggage train consisting of loot exacerbated the problem.¹¹

For Union forces in Missouri, Price's invasion created significant confusion. Upon entering Southeast Missouri Price divided his Army to employ three avenues of approach. Price's forces ranged widely and attacked Federal depots and outposts along the way. However, the Army of the Missouri's movement was slow, and contributed to giving away the element of surprise as well the only possibility of taking St Louis. Nevertheless, while the Union Army of the Arkansas under Major General Frederick Steele made a halfhearted attempt to find Price's Army while still in Arkansas, Price made it across the Arkansas River and into Missouri with little difficulty.¹² Numerous reports of Price's pending invasion came into the Union Department of the Missouri, commanded by Major General William S. Rosecrans. These reports offered wildly different accounts of troop strength and locations, which led Rosecrans to believe they were simply small cavalry raids. Despite the majority of the reports being inaccurate, there was sufficient information to know that Price's force was approaching.¹³ The Federal War Department felt there was a credible enough threat to halt Brigadier General A.J. Smith's Corps from moving as intended to reinforce Major General William T. Sherman's Army at Atlanta. Smith's Corps halted in Cairo, Illinois, and once the significance of Price's threat was correctly gauged, his troops began moving up the Mississippi River to St Louis. The greatest contribution to the war effort by Price's Raid may have been diverting of Federal forces intended for Sherman's Army Group.¹⁴

As Price's Army of Missouri moved north, his force sacked small garrisons and raided Federal supply depots. The Federal Department of Southeast Missouri was under the command of Brigadier General Thomas Ewing, Jr. To sort out the truth from the rumors, Ewing made a plan to proceed from St Louis south to Pilot Knob in advance of

A.J. Smith's troops. Ewing arrived to find Confederate forces already approaching Pilot Knob and himself out of communication with Smith. Smith decided not to move his force toward Pilot Knob due to such a potentially large Confederate force that far north. Instead, he decided to consolidate his force in preparation for the defense of St Louis. Meanwhile, Ewing prepared to defend a small fort at Pilot Knob called Fort Davidson. His orders from Rosecrans were to hold Fort Davidson against any detachment of the enemy, but if Price's army should arrive, then evacuate.¹⁵

After some skirmishing to the south, Ewing and his men took refuge in the Fort Davidson defenses. The fort was west of the town of Pilot Knob, which was located in a valley between two ridgelines, seemingly at a disadvantageous position. On the afternoon of 27 September, the Confederate artillery began firing on the fort from the heights. The fort's artillery responded efficiently despite the disadvantage of terrain. The skillful employment of Federal Artillery was successful in driving off the gunners and silencing the Confederate batteries that were within range.¹⁶

The dismounted Confederate assault that followed was one of bravery and futility. Confederate troops attacked from the south and southeast but suffered badly from artillery and small arms fire. When the rebel attack stalled to the southwest, the majority of the men took cover in a creek bed as they neared the fort. The Arkansans from Brigadier General William Cabell's brigade made one last desperate rush and came within 30 yards of the fort when Cabell's horse was shot out from under him. After taking cover in the moat, Cabell's men eventually withdrew.¹⁷ Darkness ended the fighting and the Confederates prepared to commence the attack the following morning and began building scaling ladders.¹⁸

That night Ewing received a critical piece of information from his Rebel prisoners. That the force around him was Price's army of about 12,000 with Shelby's command in his rear to cut off any reinforcements from the direction of St Louis.¹⁹ For the Union troops, surrender was not an option as Price's force had already executed several prisoners in the march north from Arkansas. Most notably, one of Ewing's subordinates, Major James Wilson and six of his men were executed after being captured in the days before the battle in retaliation for "atrocities" committed in the local area. Ewing himself was a hated man to Confederate Missourians, as he had promulgated the despised General Order No 11 in the four counties near the Kansas border in 1863 in response to the Lawrence Massacre.²⁰ With this in mind, Ewing and his force of about 1,000 men successfully escaped the fort and eluded Confederate pickets to retreat northward. The Rebels were blissfully unaware of what transpired until the magazine exploded at 3:30 a.m., signaling their departure.²¹

Even more embarrassing than the fact that the entire force escaped without the Confederate pickets sighting them, Price was unaware of their departure until 8:00 a.m., possibly attributing the explosion to some accident.²² This delay combined with a slow organization of a pursuit force prevented Price from catching Ewing. Federal losses from the battle were very light; most numbers were estimated at 130 casualties. Price's losses were significant, somewhere around 800 to 1,000 casualties.²³ Price's report attempted to spin the debacle into a victory, stating that there were significant amounts of subsistence supplies in the fort, but this event was clearly not an auspicious start to his campaign and it later influenced Price's decision-making.²⁴ Some authors called this battle the Union "Thermopylae of the West" claiming it bought critical time for the Union army to adjust

and prepare their defenses at St Louis and in Kansas.²⁵ However, while the debacle at Pilot Knob set the tone for the entire campaign, the Union stand on the Little Blue east of Lexington, Missouri, a month later, was the most critical delaying action of the campaign and considerably more deserving of the title.

After Pilot Knob, Price continued to move north in pursuit of the retreating federal garrison and approached within 40 miles of St Louis. However, Price believed the Federal force outnumbered his two to one. Thus, he decided to move west with the intention of destroying the railroad, tap the resources of the “Little Dixie” region, and gather military supplies on the way toward Kansas.²⁶ Meanwhile, his forces forayed across the countryside destroying railroad lines and capturing supplies. Price’s wagon train was growing as the spoils of war increased; by the Battle of Westport it included over 500 fully-loaded wagons. His route of march continued north until he reached the Missouri River, he then proceeded west until the Army of Missouri reached Missouri’s capital, Jefferson City.²⁷

Jefferson City was well fortified, and Price was convinced by reports that a garrison of over 12,000 troops occupied the capital. In actuality, Price’s force outnumbered the Federal militia (mostly old men and boys) almost two-to-one. Similar to his decision not to attack St Louis, Price seemed to have lost his nerve when it came to assaults on fortified positions due to the results at Pilot Knob. After a feint, Price withdrew and moved west toward Lexington.²⁸

Meanwhile, General Rosecrans called out the Missouri militia and sent A.J. Smith’s 4,500 infantry after Price. Additionally, he put Major General Alfred Pleasonton in command of his cavalry and sent him after Price at a faster pace. Pleasonton took

command of the Missouri Militia cavalry force of 4,100 and arrived in Jefferson City, only days behind Price.²⁹

Furthermore, as Price entered the western Missouri counties called the “Burnt District,” as they were the counties affected by General Order Number 11, it became problematic for Price’s men to forage off the barren surrounding area. Major General James Fagan detailed this in a letter to Price on 18 October, where he cited his surgeon’s report showing the poor condition of his men because of their meager rations and clothing.³⁰ Despite this, the local populace met Price’s arrival at Boonville with great enthusiasm as this was an area of slaveholders called the “Little Dixie Region” for their sympathies to the Confederate cause. Between 1,200 and 1,500 recruits joined Price’s ranks here; most were unarmed. Also, a considerably larger body of civilian refugees became attached to the column there, slowing it further.³¹ After departing Boonville heading west, Price dispatched raids that destroyed the railroad terminus at Sedalia to the south and crossed the Missouri River to the north to capture the Federal garrison at Glasgow. After these successful raids, Price reconsolidated and headed west toward Lexington. As he moved toward Kansas, he was slowly being boxed in as he approached General Curtis’ Federal Army of the Border.³²

Major General Samuel Curtis was a capable commander and arguably the best Federal Commander West of the Mississippi. He was a West Point graduate, civil engineer, lawyer, and veteran of the Mexican-American War.³³ Despite his successes at Pea Ridge and conquering Northern Arkansas, political entanglements caused him to be relegated to command the Department of Kansas. Curtis’ department was grossly undermanned with most of his soldiers scattered across Indian Territory. Upon receiving

word of the Confederate movements into Missouri on 17 September, he immediately recalled his forces, which amounted to about 4,000 men that were within useful range. He immediately asked the Kansas Governor, Thomas Carney, to call out the Kansas Militia.³⁴

Despite repeated requests, Governor Carney did not believe that there was an actual threat to Kansas. His attention was on the critical election of 1864 that had become a bitter struggle within the Kansas Republican Party.³⁵ Carney believed that this was simply a ploy by Curtis to remove citizens from the polls who were friendly to the governor. Carney viewed Curtis as an ally of the governor's bitter enemy, Senator James H. Lane. Such was the distrust between the two Republican factions that Carney believed that Curtis was acting to help Lane retain power in the state. Despite Curtis' repeated appeals, it was not until 9 October that Governor Carney wired Rosecrans to discern the truth and then finally acquiesced and called out the Kansas Militia.³⁶ The day after the governor's proclamation, Curtis declared martial law throughout the state, calling all men between eighteen and sixty to temporary military service.³⁷ After Curtis did this, Carney again believed that this was some trick and not a real threat. Despite Curtis' assurances to the contrary, this feeling persisted among many of Carney's militia commanders. However, the callout was successful and by 15 October, Curtis had 15,000 men assembled along the Kansas/Missouri border.³⁸

One of Curtis' chief Lieutenants was Major General James G. Blunt. Originally, from Maine, James Blunt had settled in Kansas before the war and had ardent abolitionist views. He was a hard fighter and seemed to be a born military commander. His battlefield successes and ability as a combat commander led to the rank of major general—the only

Kansan to reach that rank during the Civil War. Curtis gave Blunt command of his veteran volunteers as well as a large number of the newly assimilated Kansas militia. Blunt organized his forces into three brigades and placed Brigadier General W.H.M. Fishback and his militia under Colonel Charles W. Blair, a veteran commander. Fishback was insulted at being subordinate to a colonel and believed that the militia should still fall under direct control from state authorities. Additionally, Fishback was a crony of Carney and shared his distrust of Curtis.³⁹ At Curtis's order, Blunt moved his command across the border to Hickman Mills, Missouri. Unbeknownst to Blunt or Blair, on 16 October Fishback ordered the Commander of the 6th Kansas Militia, Colonel James Snoddy, to return his unit to Kansas. Blunt immediately arrested them both and placed them under the command of another officer.⁴⁰ Blunt sent Fishback and Snoddy to the rear under arrest but Curtis later released both.⁴¹ It was clear what Blunt thought of these political games; he quickly put an end to it in his command. However, Carney, supported by the fact that political generals such as Fishback continued to circulate amongst the Kansas Militia that Price's army was nowhere near Kansas nor was there a substantial threat. Carney's political newspaper still contended that Price was not a threat the very day that Blunt's troops made contact with the vanguard of Price's column in Lexington, Missouri.⁴²

Blunt moved his command to Lexington, Missouri, on 18 October, and advanced elements discovered Price's army at Waverly advancing toward his location. At 10 a.m. on 19 October, Blunt received a message from Curtis stating that he could not send him reinforcements because Carney was making trouble with the militia. Curtis made it clear his intentions were to go as far as he could with militia support, which he believed

limited the advance to the banks of the Big Blue River west of Independence.⁴³ In Blunt's official report, he stated that Curtis was unable to provide reinforcements due to "the embarrassments thrown in his way by the governor of Kansas." Just after receiving Curtis's message, Blunt's pickets made contact with multiple converging rebel columns east of Lexington. Blunt moved quickly to organize a defensive position southeast of Lexington that provided an easy avenue of retreat along the Independence Road. After a few hours of skirmishing, Blunt withdrew his force having ascertained that this indeed was Price's whole army and out of a desire to avoid a general engagement. Blunt executed the withdrawal under mounting Confederate pressure, his rear guard he entrusted to his most capable commander, Colonel Thomas Moonlight.⁴⁴

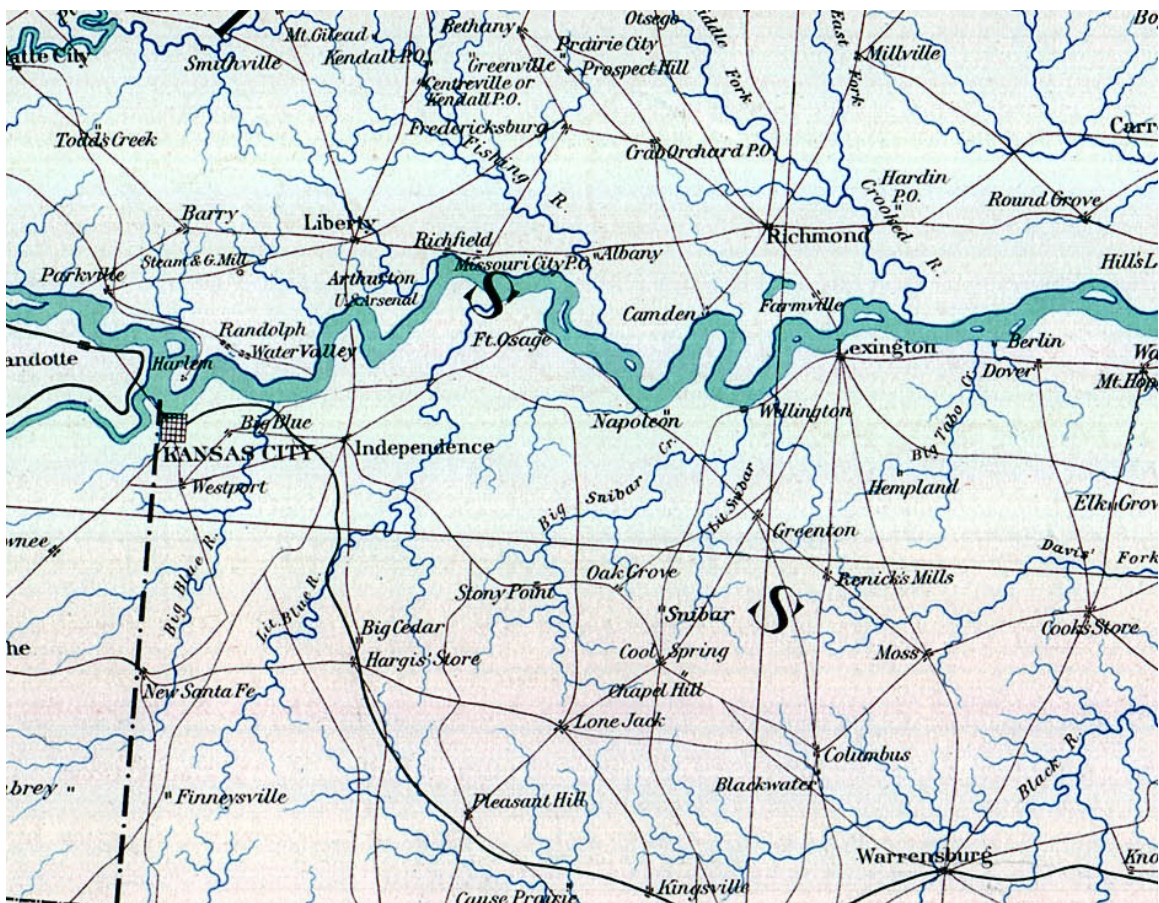


Figure 2. Western Missouri during the Civil War

Source: United States War Department, *Atlas to Accompany the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC: Government Print Official, 1891-1895), Plate 26.

Moonlight was a Scottish immigrant who served in the antebellum US Army in the artillery as well as the cavalry in numerous Indian wars before the Civil War. Despite being a man of military experience, he did not receive a commission from Kansas's Republican government at the start of the war because he was a Democrat. Later, when he did get his opportunity, he rose through the ranks quickly and, after serving as General Blunt's chief of staff, was given Command of the 11th Kansas Cavalry, followed by

command of a brigade, which he commanded during Price's Campaign.⁴⁵ (see Appendix A)

Moonlight maneuvered his rear guard to slow the Confederate pursuit and avoid being outflanked or cut off from the main body. While using his howitzers to cover the withdrawal, the tongue of one of the guns was broken so the men, under fire, had to improvise a connection with another field piece to enable its withdrawal.⁴⁶ After the war, Moonlight described his ordeal as follows:

I have witnessed some fighting and been in dangerous places, but never did I feel as much the importance of my trust, nor was I ever so hard pressed on that retreat. My regiment was in the rear and contested every inch of ground, fighting hand to hand with advancing and flanking forces, never yielding their position until ordered. Living men could not have done more than they did, and although this was not the longest or most desperate fight of their enlistments, it was the most trying and dangerous, as we were liable at any moment to be completely cut to pieces or captured.⁴⁷

The pursuit ended at about 2 a.m. on the morning of the 20th when Moonlight reached the safety of the west bank of the Little Blue River, eight miles from Independence, Missouri.

Before the Second Battle of Lexington began, Blunt gave orders to Captain H. E. Palmer, who commanded Company A, 11th Kansas Cavalry Regiment, to hold the Dover road leading east out of Lexington until he received orders for withdrawal. Palmer did just that, encountering Confederate cavalry and driving them out of his area late in the afternoon. Despite his section of the battlefield becoming quiet, he could hear the fighting moving in the direction of a Federal withdrawal. After sending multiple messengers and not receiving a reply, he paroled his newly-captured Rebel prisoners and rode into Lexington to discover it completely infested with Price's army. As he observed stacked arms in the streets and soldiers looting, he decided to ride his troops in a column of twos

right through town as if they belonged there. Initially, their movement was successful because dust covered their uniforms and many of Palmer's scouts were in "partisan" clothing. They would have gone unobserved if it were not for a civilian woman who asked them if they came into town to surrender seeing their Union colors as they rode by. Additionally, a Rebel officer attempted to stop them in order to find out which command they were from, and Palmer's men responded with a gunshot. Palmer and his men shot their way out of the west side of town and made their way through the darkness to where Moonlight's rear guard was conducting its fighting withdrawal. Amazingly, after fighting through the Confederate lines, Palmer and his men were able to link back up with Blunt's command without losing a trooper.⁴⁸

Curtis was relieved to have positive information of the location of Price's forces, yet additionally displeased that he was heading directly for Kansas. In Curtis's reply to Blunt's request for reinforcements he stated, "The blow you gave the enemy is doing good in the rear. It is crushing some of the silly rumors that had well nigh ruined my prospects of a successful defense."⁴⁹ Blunt, however, was upset by Curtis's refusal to send reinforcements to his position and insisted his present position along the Little Blue River was ideal for stopping the Confederate advance, he also urged Curtis to see the ground for himself.⁵⁰

Despite Blunt's appeal, Curtis's orders were firm; He must move his command toward the Big Blue. Curtis further ordered him to leave a force to burn the bridge in order to delay the Confederate crossing of the Little Blue, suggesting Moonlight be given the task.⁵¹ Despite his order, Curtis agreed with Blunt that the line on the Little Blue would have been the ideal place to trap the Rebel force, but noted he had to yield to

sensitivities among the Kansas Militia. It was not until the Commander of the Kansas Militia, Major General George Deitzler, delivered a speech assuring his men that they would not be moved very far into Missouri that they consented to cross the border.⁵² This was the point in the campaign where Union leaders after the war criticized Curtis for not moving forward with his entire force, which might have resulted in a complete entrapment of Price's Army of Missouri. Some of those critics were Blunt, Moonlight, Colonel Samuel J. Crawford, and Brigadier General John B. Sanborn.⁵³

On 18 October, Curtis received word of Rosecrans's forces moving from the east. He learned that Rosecrans's infantry, under A.J. Smith, was moving to the south of Price at Sedalia, while Pleasonton's cavalry pursued from the east. With the Missouri River to the north and his own Army of the Border to the west, it had the makings of an opportunity to destroy Price's command. Once the Battle of Second Lexington occurred, the Federal forces had confirmation of Price's intentions to move toward Kansas. Criticisms after the war came from Blunt and Moonlight, whom both advocated stopping Price at the Little Blue to prevent him from getting any closer to Kansas. Colonel Samuel J. Crawford pointed to Curtis's inability to control the Kansas Militia or Carney's political generals as the reason he was unable to support Blunt at the Little Blue.⁵⁴ Despite this criticism, which came after the war and Curtis's death, Curtis did not have all of the information he needed to make that decision or the time required to make it.⁵⁵

Throughout the entirety of Price's Raid, communication between Rosecrans and Curtis was very confused because neither knew Price's exact location. Most of the fault of this lay with Rosecrans. Missouri was his department, and his men pursued and harassed Price's column all the way across the state. Rosecrans himself remained at his

headquarters in St. Louis throughout the campaign and left the execution of the pursuit to Pleasonton, but that only came in earnest after Price turned west from the vicinity of St Louis. Rosecrans's efforts to coordinate the pursuit from the rear proved problematic. Further confusion resulted from Pleasonton changing his line of march despite Rosecrans's direction.⁵⁶ One of Pleasonton's subordinates, Brigadier General John Sanborn, led the pursuit in the rear of Price's column, and he tried desperately to communicate with Blunt to coordinate efforts. Only a few messages ever made it through, and the information that did get through was neither accurate nor timely enough to influence effectively events on the Little Blue. Sanborn later stated that he and Blunt's inability to coordinate was the most unfortunate part of the entire campaign.⁵⁷

Curtis had to work within his political boundaries and make decisions with the information he had available at the time. Curtis acknowledged that he would have preferred to take his entire force to the vicinity of Lexington, but political constraints prevented him from doing so.⁵⁸ Had he been able to move forward to the Little Blue there is no guarantee that all of the converging Federal forces would have met at the proper moment to defeat Price's Army. Additionally, had Curtis used an iron fist and forced his men forward he would have likely faced large numbers of deserters from the militia. Furthermore, Pleasonton's force might not have caught Price's rear before Price had an opportunity to push past Curtis. However, history does show that Curtis made a decisive decision that contributed to success at the Battle of Westport.

Leading up to 21 October both Curtis and Blunt displayed the appropriate use of the principles of mission command that would serve them well over the following days. During the gathering of forces and assembling of the Army, Curtis trusted and relied

heavily on Blunt to execute his intent when organizing his division and preparing it for the upcoming campaign. When executing the move into Missouri Curtis additionally demonstrated his trust in Blunt to execute within his intent, which was essentially a movement to contact to find Price's Army. It was because of the mutual trust that Curtis accepted prudent risk in allowing Blunt the latitude to make necessary risk decisions in the execution of that mission. Likewise, Blunt displayed disciplined initiative in executing a delaying action of Price's army at Lexington. He understood Curtis's intent and made risk decisions in regards to the safe withdrawal of his forces to the Little Blue River. After the engagement at Lexington both generals had a shared understanding of what the future battle plan would be.

The Battle of the Little Blue on 21 October 1864 would be critical to the outcome of the campaign. Curtis, Blunt, and Moonlight each played a key part in that day's events. Their use of mission command at the Little Blue would ultimately contribute to victory at the culminating battle of Price's Raid, the Battle of Westport.

¹ Mark A. Lause, *Price's Lost Campaign, the 1864 Invasion of Missouri* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2011), 2-3.

² Ibid., 1-2.

³ Bleeding Kansas was the term used by anti-slavery activists given to the conflict over popular sovereignty in the settlement of the Kansas Territory. Popular sovereignty declared that the majority of the state's population would determine whether it was a slave state or free, prompting a breakout of violence between pro-slavery and anti-slavery parties that flocked to the region.

⁴ Trans-Mississippi references American Civil War military activities west of the Mississippi River.

⁵ United States War Department, "Letter of General Sterling Price to General Kirby Smith 23 July 1864," in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official*

Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (hereafter referred to as OR) 70 Volumes in 128 Parts (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1893), 41, Part 2, 1023.

⁶ Howard N. Monnett, *Action Before Westport 1864*, rev. ed. (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 1995), 12; Lause, *Price's Lost Campaign*, 10-11.

⁷ United States War Department, "General Kirby Smith's Letter to Jefferson Davis, 5 May 1864," in OR, 34, Part 1, 478.

⁸ United States War Department, "General Kirby Smith's Report to Jefferson Davis, 21 August 1864," in OR, 41, Part 1, 116.

⁹ United States War Department, "General Kirby Smith's Orders to General Sterling Price, 4 August 1864," in OR, 41, Part 2, 1040-1041.

¹⁰ Lause, *Price's Lost Campaign*, 30-32.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹² Stephen B. Oates, *Confederate Cavalry West of the River* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1961), 144.

¹³ Lause, *Price's Lost Campaign*, 30.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

¹⁵ United States War Department, "General Ewing's Report, 20 October 1864," in OR, 41, Part 1, 446.

¹⁶ Lause, *Price's Lost Campaign*, 51-52.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁸ Thomas C. Fletcher, "The Battle of Pilot Knob, and the Retreat to Leasburg," in *War Papers and Personal Reminiscences, 1861-1865*, ed. Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States (St Louis, MO: Commandry of the State of Missouri, 1892), 46.

¹⁹ United States War Department, "General Ewing's Report, 20 October 1864," in OR, 41, Part 1, 448.

²⁰ Albert Castel, *General Sterling Price, and the Civil War in the West* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), 214. General Order No 11 was considered retribution for the killings in Lawrence Kansas by pro-slavery guerillas. Federal authorities felt that the four counties affected by the order were the primary

source for support for those guerillas. The order authorized military authorities to evict any persons who did not establish their loyalty with the Union. Southerners considered this to be “barbarous” against civilians. Also see Albert Castel, *A Frontier State at War: Kansas 1861-1865* (Lawrence, KS: Kansas Heritage Press, 1958), 142-143.

²¹ Lause, *Price’s Lost Campaign*, 55.

²² Fletcher, “Battle of Pilot Knob,” 45-46.

²³ Lause, *Price’s Lost Campaign*, 53.

²⁴ United States War Department, “General Sterling Price’s Report, 28 December 1864,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 629.

²⁵ Castel, *A Frontier State at War*, 185.

²⁶ United States War Department, “General Sterling Price’s Report, 28 December 1864,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 630.

²⁷ Monnett, *Action Before Westport 1864*, 26.

²⁸ United States War Department, “General Sterling Price’s Report, 28 December 1864,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 631.

²⁹ United States War Department, “General Rosecrans Report,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 311.

³⁰ United States War Department, “Major General Fagan’s Letter to General Price, 18 October 1864,” in OR, 41, Part 4, 1003-1004.

³¹ United States War Department, “General Sterling Price’s Report 28 December 1864,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 631-632.

³² Monnett, *Action Before Westport 1864*, 30-32.

³³ *Ibid.*, 35.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

³⁶ United States War Department, “Telegrams between Gov Carney, and Gen Rosecrans,” in OR, 41, Part 3, 724.

³⁷ Monnett, *Action Before Westport 1864*, 39.

³⁸ Ibid., 40.

³⁹ Ibid., 45.

⁴⁰ United States War Department, "Major General Blunt's Report, 24 December 1864," in OR, 41, Part 1, 572.

⁴¹ United States War Department, "Report of Brigadier General Fishback, 26 December 1864," in OR, 41, Part 1, 620.

⁴² Samuel J. Crawford, *Kansas in the Sixties* (Chicago, IL: A.C. McClurg and Co, 1911), 143.

⁴³ James G. Blunt, "General Blunt's Account of His Civil War Experiences," *The Kansas Historical Quarterly* (May 1932): 254.

⁴⁴ United States War Department, "Major General Blunt's Report, 24 December 1864," in OR, 41, Part 1, 573.

⁴⁵ Kip Lindberg et al., eds., "The Eagle of the 11th Kansas," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* (2003): 1-2.

⁴⁶ United States War Department, "Moonlight's Report, 15 December 1864, 15 December 1864," in OR, 41, Part 1, 591-592.

⁴⁷ Lindberg, "The Eagle of the 11th Kansas," 1-2.

⁴⁸ First Battle of Lexington Missouri, 12-20 September 1861, was a mini-siege from of the pro-federal garrison by the Missouri State Guard which was pro-Confederate. Eventually the garrison surrendered giving Sterling Price his first victory; Palmer's scouts were in the front of the formation, their 'partisan' uniform resembled civilians clothing or that similar to rebel partisans; H. Palmer, "The Soldiers of Kansas," in G. W. Martin, *Kansas State Historical Society* (Topeka: State Printing Office, 1905-1906 Vol 9), 435-438.

⁴⁹ United States War Department, "Curtis's Letter to Blunt, 20 October 1864," in OR, 41, Part 4, 145.

⁵⁰ United States War Department, "Blunt's Reply to Curtis, 20 October 1864," in OR, 41, Part 4, 145-146.

⁵¹ United States War Department, "Major General Curtis's Report, January 1865," in OR, 41, Part 4, 476.

⁵² Ibid., 474.

⁵³ United States War Department, “Brigadier General Sanborn’s Report,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 388-389; United States War Department, “Major General Blunt’s Report, 24 December 1864,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 574; Crawford, *Kansas in the Sixties*, 144-145; Blunt, “General Blunt’s Account of His Civil War Experiences,” 254-255.

⁵⁴ Crawford, *Kansas in the Sixties*. 144-145.

⁵⁵ General Samuel Curtis died on 26 December 1866.

⁵⁶ United States War Department, “Major General Rosecrans’ Report,” in OR 41, Part 1, 312.

⁵⁷ United States War Department “Brigadier General Sanborn’s Report,” in OR 41, Part 1, 388-389.

⁵⁸ United States War Department, “Major General Curtis’s Report, January 1865,” in OR, 41, Part 4, 475.

CHAPTER 3

THE FIGHT OVER THE LITTLE BLUE

On the morning of 21 October 1864, on the banks of the Little Blue River, just east of Kansas Town, Missouri (modern-day Kansas City), a skirmish began that would influence the outcome of Price's Raid into Missouri. Determined efforts by Union commanders given freedom to execute tactically, in their judgment, enabled the successful delay of the Confederate Army of Missouri for an entire day. Colonel Thomas Moonlight's decision to make his withdrawal a holding action would prove to be pivotal in the outcome of Price's Raid. Major General James G. Blunt's arrival with 2,000 reinforcements came at a critical moment in the battle and allowed the Union Army of the Border to double the amount of time they successfully held the Confederate army in check.¹ Major General Samuel Ryan Curtis's assessment of the situation and timely decision to withdraw kept his forces from suffering significant casualties and preserved combat power for his defensive line along the Big Blue River as well as the subsequent decisive action before Westport.

Curtis made the decision to fortify his position along the Big Blue River, west of Independence and use that as his defensive line to halt Major General Sterling Price's progress toward Kansas. This was a practical political decision based on the difficulty he encountered moving a significant percentage of his force, the Kansas State Militia (KSM), any further into Missouri. Blunt knew the ground along both rivers, and it was his opinion that the best position to stop Price was east of Independence along the Little Blue River. Despite Blunt's objections, on 20 October Curtis ordered Blunt to fall back to Independence in preparation for withdrawal to the Big Blue. Curtis also instructed Blunt

to leave a small force behind to delay the Confederate army's crossing of the Little Blue River and suggested Moonlight for the assignment. Curtis stated in his report after the battle that his instructions were not to fight a battle but to delay the enemy advance; his primary concern being to concentrate the Army of the Border along the Big Blue.² It is not surprising that Curtis specifically suggested Moonlight for the assignment. He had just executed a withdrawal from Lexington the day before and was considered Blunt's most capable brigade commander.

Blunt understood his orders, which were to leave four squadrons of cavalry at the crossing sites of the Little Blue and move the remainder of his command to Independence.³ Before his departure, Blunt instructed Moonlight to burn the Lexington-Independence road bridge over the Little Blue if the enemy advanced in force, and put up as much resistance as possible until Blunt was notified.⁴ Furthermore, Blunt instructed Moonlight to ensure that he keep the crossing locations along the river "picketed."⁵ Moonlight was not pleased with the decision to leave him with so few men to defend the crossings. After a "remonstrance" Blunt agreed to give Moonlight the entire 11th Kansas Cavalry (10 companies present) as well as four howitzers.⁶

Blunt understood Curtis's intent but after consulting with Moonlight, he agreed with his judgment that he needed the necessary additional force to execute that intent. Moonlight also understood the intent was to delay the rebel army. Blunt seemed to have removed the decision to withdrawal from Moonlight by instructing him to send word of when he was engaged. Blunt also supplied Moonlight with a telegrapher to enable reporting of events to Independence rapidly. Moonlight summarized his understanding of his orders as "watch the enemy, fight him at the crossing, and burn the bridge."⁷

Interestingly, Senator James H. Lane (who was working on Curtis's staff), understood that the orders for Moonlight were to hold as long as possible.⁸ Moonlight agreed with Blunt that the Little Blue would have made for a much better defensive line than the Big Blue.

After the war, Moonlight stated that he understood that his orders were not to fight but to withdraw to Independence. However, Moonlight decided he was going to hold along the Little Blue as long as possible and make the Little Blue a battlefield, understanding the longer Price was delayed, the more time was available for the militia to prepare. Any delay also gave Major General Alfred Pleasonton's Provisional Cavalry Division, then rapidly moving west from Columbia, Missouri, more time fall upon Price's rear.⁹ The decision Moonlight made would do just that, buying time for Curtis's army behind him and allowing Pleasonton to catch up to the rear of Price's column. However, Moonlight was still operating within General Curtis's intent to delay, and his decision to hold as long as he did was ultimately the most critical decision made in the battle of Westport.

Before the battle, Moonlight had his men positioned west of the Little Blue on high ground not far from the Lexington-Independence Road. A covered bridge located in a relatively flat area of terrain provided the road its crossing point over the river. Several accounts mentioned that the river was low on 21 October, and crossing sites were numerous up and down the river. The terrain west of the Little Blue was described as heavily timbered along a bluff just west of the river. As instructed, Moonlight had skirmishers emplaced along some of the prominent crossing sites as well as a mile east of the covered bridge.¹⁰ Captain Samuel Greer and Company I, 11th Kansas were in

position near a ford approximately a mile downstream (north) from the bridge. Captain Greer sent a smaller detachment under Lieutenant William Drew with twenty men to defend another ford approximately two miles further north.¹¹ Captain Joel Huntoon with Company H, was positioned at a ford anywhere from two to four miles to the south. In the middle, Major Martin Anderson had two companies defending the covered bridge crossing sites with instructions to burn the bridge once the rebel forces advanced.¹² Moonlight's howitzers were on both sides of the road on the west side of the river in order "rake the bridge."¹³ It is not definitively known where the remainder of the 11th Kansas was prior to the beginning of the battle; they may have been in a field camp on the hills just west of the Little Blue and north of the road.¹⁴ Additionally, on 20 October, the troopers busied themselves preparing their positions, felling trees to block the road and creating abatis.¹⁵

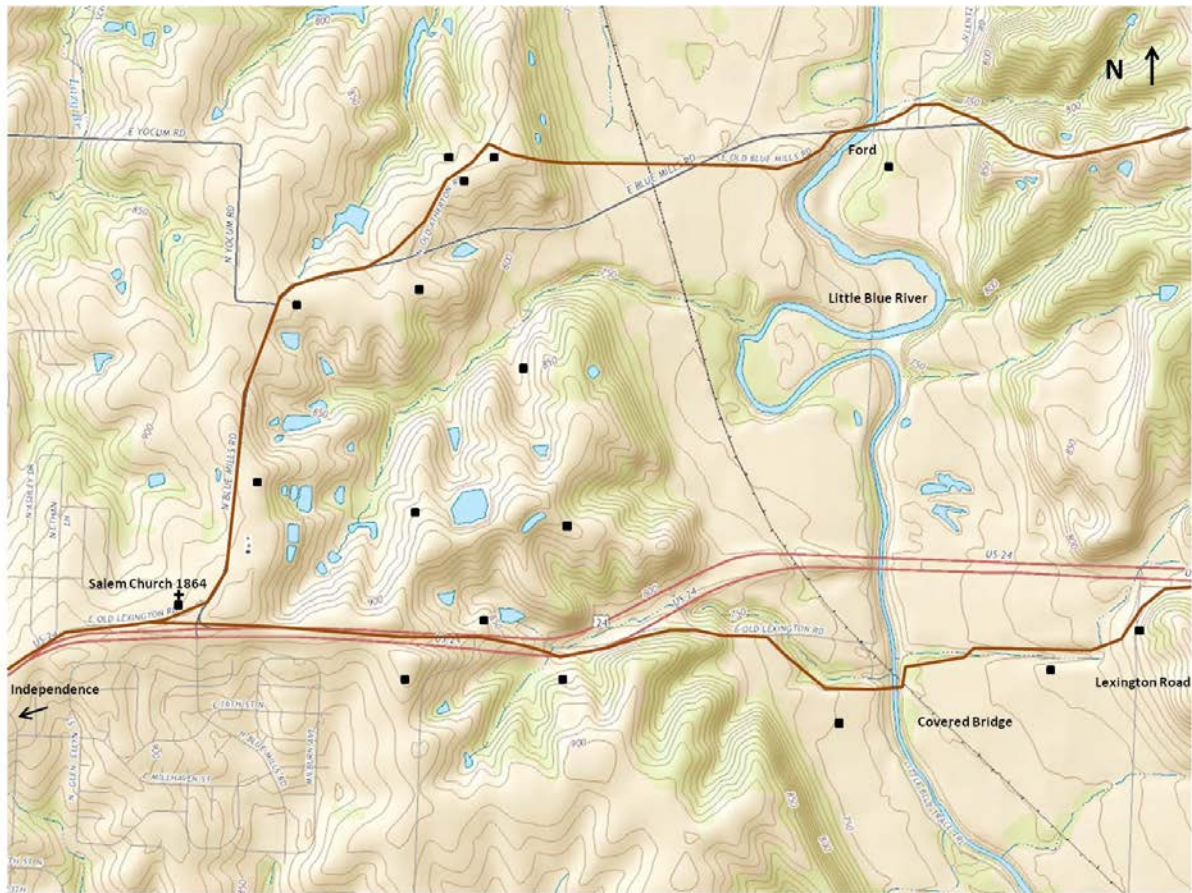


Figure 4. Roads in the Little Blue Battle vicinity, 1860s

Source: USGS map. Overlays on the map were completed by the author. References for the overlays map collected from property maps of Jackson County in 1870 and 1877. Overlay is referenced from the Jackson County Map of 1877, from the Missouri Historical Society Online Collection; H. Z. Hickman's survey of the Roads of Jackson County in the 1880s where he collected sketches of the late 1800s annotating where the road was prior to that time and where it would be moved to. Specifically: J. D. Bagby's sketch in 1892 of the route of the new segment of today's "Old Blue Mills Road," J. D. Bagby's sketch in 1889 of the "Old Bue Mills Road" east of the Little Blue with survey for the new route, Unknown authors sketch of the Lexington-Independence Road east of Little Blue on 30 July 30 1892, Unknown author's detailed sketch of the original covered bridge crossing site and road route along with the survey for the new route for the Lexington-Independence road which is closer to where today's "Old Lexington road" exists.

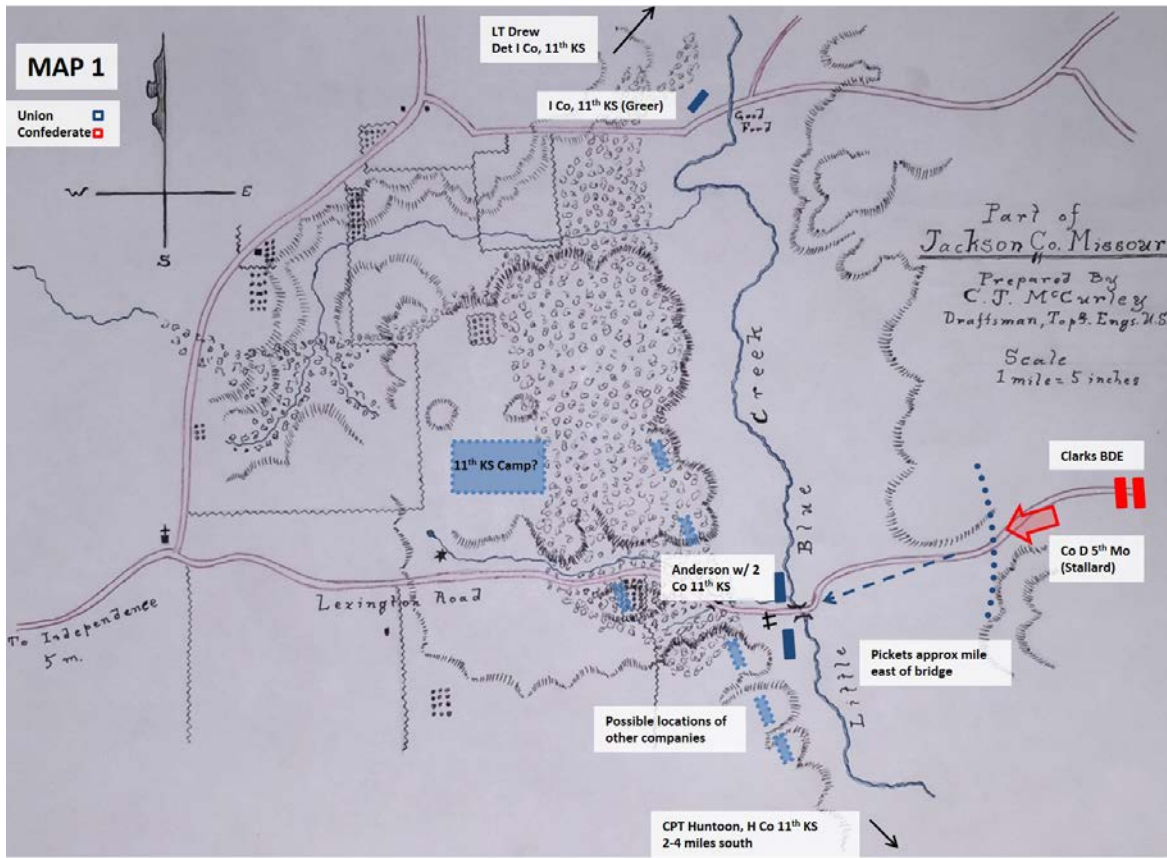


Figure 5. Battle Begins, Approximately 6:30 to 7:30 a.m.

Source: Overlays prepared by the author. Map used by permission of the artist, Cliff McCurley. References for the drawing of the map collected from the Official Records of the Civil War as well as property maps of Jackson County in 1870 and 1877. Note: Map and overlay references same as figure 4.

On the morning of 21 October, lead elements of Price's Confederate army met the Federal pickets stationed east of the Little Blue. Confederate Major General John Sappington Marmaduke commanded the lead division in Price's army, and his advanced guard was a detachment from Company D, 5th Missouri Cavalry. This detachment, commanded by Captain D.R. Stallard, made first contact with Moonlight's pickets and quickly drove them west toward the river.¹⁶ Just behind the advanced guard was

Brigadier General John Clark's Brigade, which assisted in pushing the Union pickets across the river. This took place between approximately 7 and 8 a.m., and brisk firing ensued near the covered bridge. At about this time Major Anderson sent a wagonload of hay forward into the bridge and set on fire.¹⁷ After completing this task, Anderson's companies began to fall back across the relatively flat, wooded floodplain toward the bluffs to his rear (west), joining the rest of the 11th Kansas.¹⁸ On the hills to the west Private A.S. Childers, Company C 11th Kansas Cavalry, was just starting breakfast when he saw a rebel battery on a hill across the river and saw smoke coming up from the burning bridge.¹⁹ Captain Henry E. Palmer, Company A 11th Kansas Cavalry, was mending his pants in camp when the fighting erupted, he did not have time to put them on so he threw them over his saddle and rode forward to position his men pantsless.²⁰

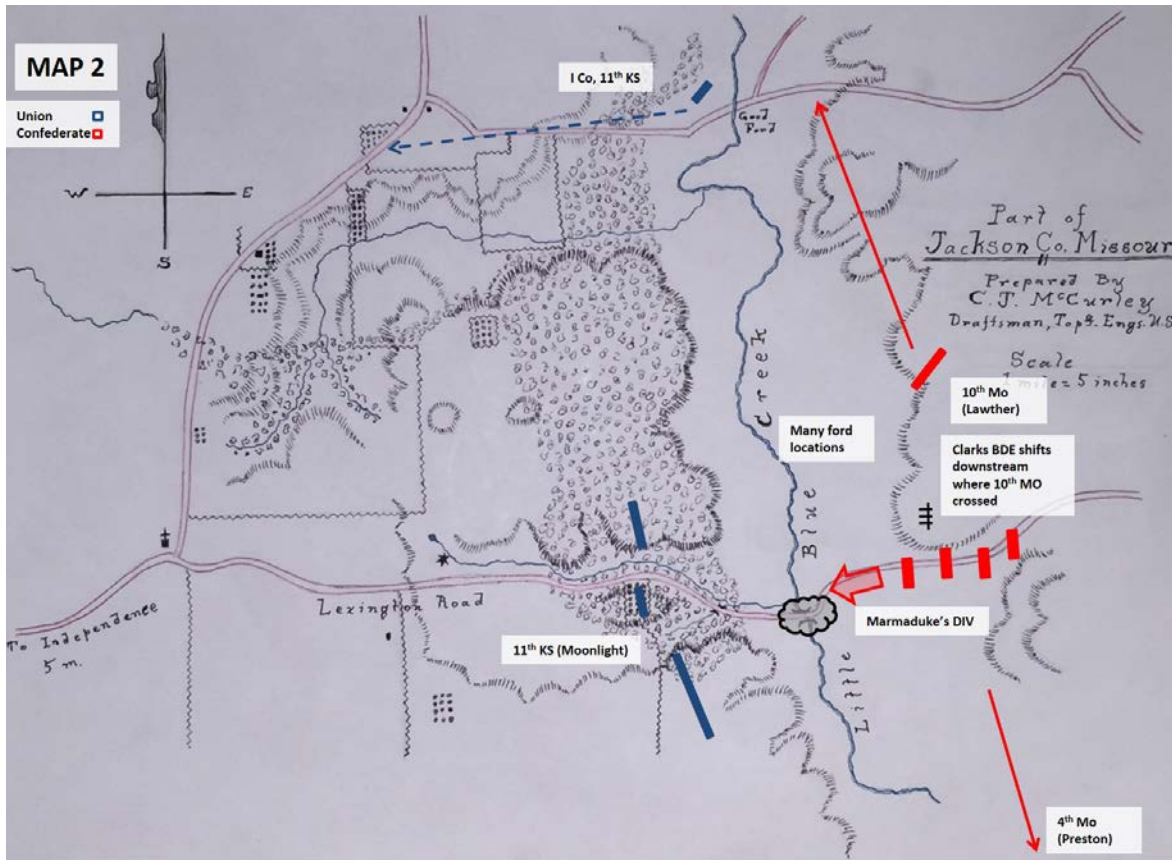


Figure 6. Flanking movement, approximately 7:30 to 8:30 a.m.

Source: Overlays prepared by the author. Map used by permission of the artist, Cliff McCurley. References for the drawing of the map collected from the Official Records of the Civil War as well as property maps of Jackson County in 1870 and 1877. Note: Map and overlay references same as figure 4.

Seeing the bridge burning, Marmaduke immediately instructed Clark to dispatch two elements to secure crossing sites both upstream and downstream. Throughout the campaign, Price was concerned about the safety of his over 500 wagons and the army would need a crossing site over the Little Blue adequate to move all of them across. Clark promptly complied with his instructions, sending Colonel Robert R. Lawther and his 10th Missouri Cavalry to the north, and Lieutenant Colonel William J. Preston and the 4th

Missouri Cavalry to the south. Soon thereafter, Clark received word from Lawther that the northern ford was clear and the enemy force in that vicinity were falling back toward Independence. Clark moved his brigade north to the downstream ford although he described the crossing as very difficult and slow.²¹

At the opening of the action, Moonlight attempted to telegraph Independence, but the line was down, so he dispatched a courier not knowing if word made it through.²² To the north, Greer may have seen the advance of Clark's brigade toward the ford or saw them crossing the Little Blue to his south and decided his position was untenable, so he fell back toward Independence.²³ Moonlight criticized Greer in his official report, stating that he fell back without firing a shot. However, he added that Greer's stated reason was that there were too many enemy crossing points, likely south of him.²⁴

The northern ford location itself is difficult to pinpoint with any accuracy; Clark reported that he sent Lawther to a ford one-half mile downstream; other reports have said it was a mile.²⁵ Private John B. Hart, Co I 11th Kansas, stated that Company I was guarding a ford approximately one and one-half mile downstream (which is close to the present day crossing of the Blue Mills Road over the Little Blue where the ford from the Santa Fe Trail was believed to be located). In all probability, Lawther crossed at that location and rode immediately south along the banks of the river in an attempt to secure the far side of the river in support of the main army's crossing near the covered bridge. Hart was in Lieutenant William Y. Drew's detachment of Company I, 11th Kansas that secured an additional ford north of Greer's position. When Greer made his abrupt decision to withdraw due to the large numbers of the Confederate column coming his way, he neglected to notify Drew.

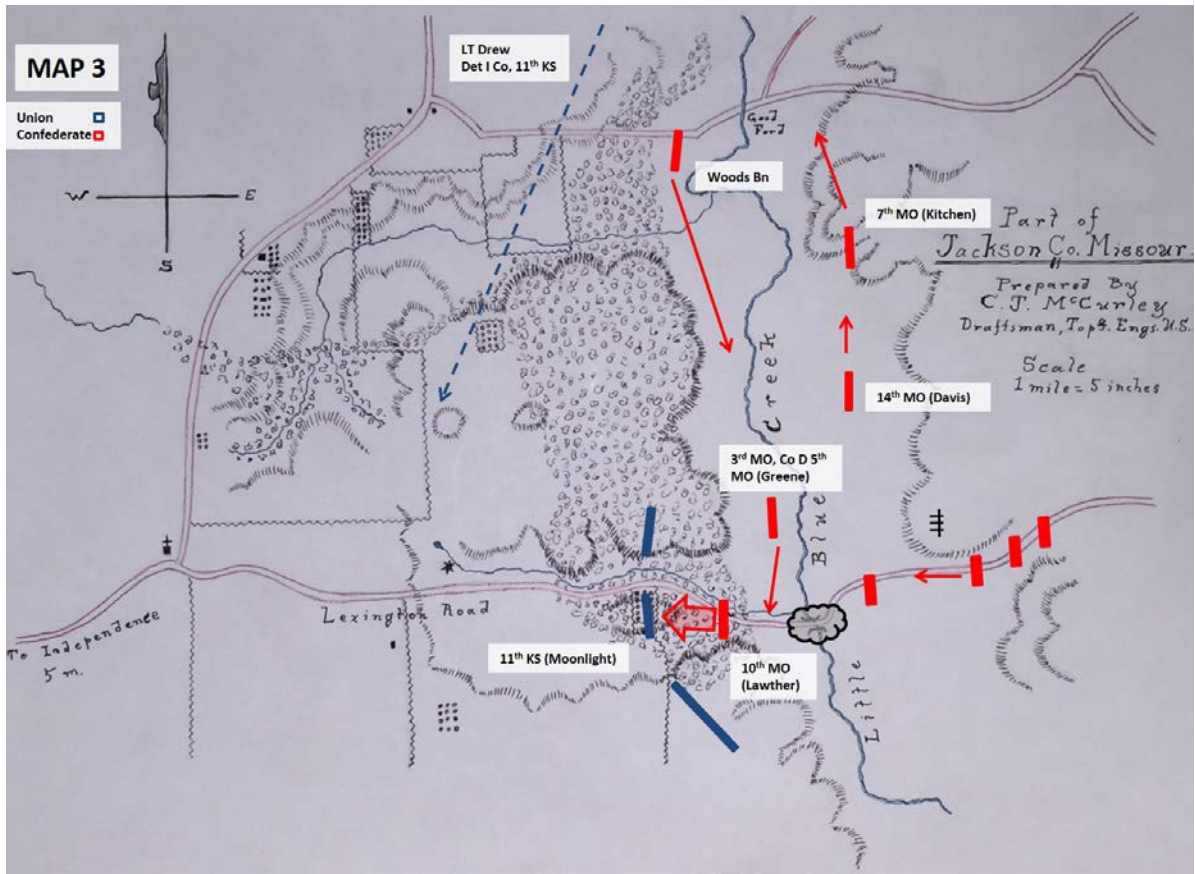


Figure 7. Lawther's attack, approx. 8:30 to 9:30 a.m.

Source: Overlays prepared by the author. Map used by permission of the artist, Cliff McCurley.

Fearing that this had been the case, Drew moved his detachment south toward the sound of the guns and ran into some of Marmaduke's men that had crossed the river. A chase ensued and after getting a safe distance away on top of the ridge, they looked back to see Marmaduke's entire column coming down the road and marching "up the valley." Hart concluded that they had all crossed at the ford Greer was supposed to be guarding. Hart and the rest of Drew's detachment avoided entrapment and made it back to the remainder of the 11th Kansas. Hart later found out that Greer fell back when the first

shots were fired and everyone in Company I considered him a coward, Drew was eventually promoted to command of the company.²⁶ Based on Hart's account of seeing Marmaduke's men moving up the valley, along with Colonel Greene's and Clark's reports, it seems most likely that after crossing at the ford, Marmaduke's men proceeded south to the vicinity of the covered bridge, riding toward the sound of the guns.

The degree the covered bridge at the crossing site of the Lexington-Independence road was burned is unclear because of conflicting reports. Price said that it was burned by the Federals.²⁷ Curtis stated that the bridge had been burned but by some accident, it had been put out.²⁸ A.S. Childers who had a position on the high ground above the bridge stated he could see his comrades that started the fire fall back and within minutes, rebels were across the bridge.²⁹ However, there does seem to be enough evidence to conclude that the bridge was saved to a degree that allowed movement of artillery, and possibly the entirety of Price's column. The Confederates burned it the following day in order to delay Pleasonton's pursuit. Captain Richard Hinton, 2nd Colorado Cavalry, was not present when the bridge was burned but he stated in his account that the rebels put the fire out and used the bridge to cross their artillery.³⁰

When Lawther reached the vicinity of the bridge Anderson's two companies probably fell back to the ridgeline with the rest of the 11th Kansas. Underestimating the size and strength of the 11th Kansas's positions behind stonewalls, at 90-degree angles from the Lexington-Independence Road; Lawther rushed headlong toward their position. Lawther's report on the battle is extremely brief, most likely due to his embarrassment over a failed attack that essentially removed his command from the remainder of the battle. Clark stated that Lawther "indiscreetly" attacked a heavy enemy force fortified

behind stonewalls.³¹ His attack was clearly ill-conceived, and he had made it without support from the other units, which were still making their way south from the ford.

Not far to his rear, most likely following his route, Greene with the 3rd Missouri, along with Captain Stallard's Company D 5th Missouri, came close to the vicinity where Lawther made his attack. Clark was with Greene's force rushing forward to the sound of battle when he discovered Lawther's attack repulsed and then was counterattacked by the 11th Kansas, which drove him back in confusion. Greene formed a line across the road (presumably the Lexington-Independence Road) with Lieutenant Williams's three-gun artillery battery supporting him as Lawther's command went to the rear. Greene was slowly driven back and used the artillery to protect his flanks in a desperate close-range fight. Clark stated that Greene had to hold unsupported for an extended period due to the river crossing delaying the rest of the brigade. As the situation became desperate Wood's Battalion arrived to help stem the Federal tide, and they led a counter attack. However, Federal reinforcements arrived simultaneously and pushed the rebels back to their original positions. Confederate ammunition was running low and just as the situation became dire, Kitchen's Regiment with Davies' Battalion arrived as "gallant veteran infantry" and pushed the Federals back to their original position.³²

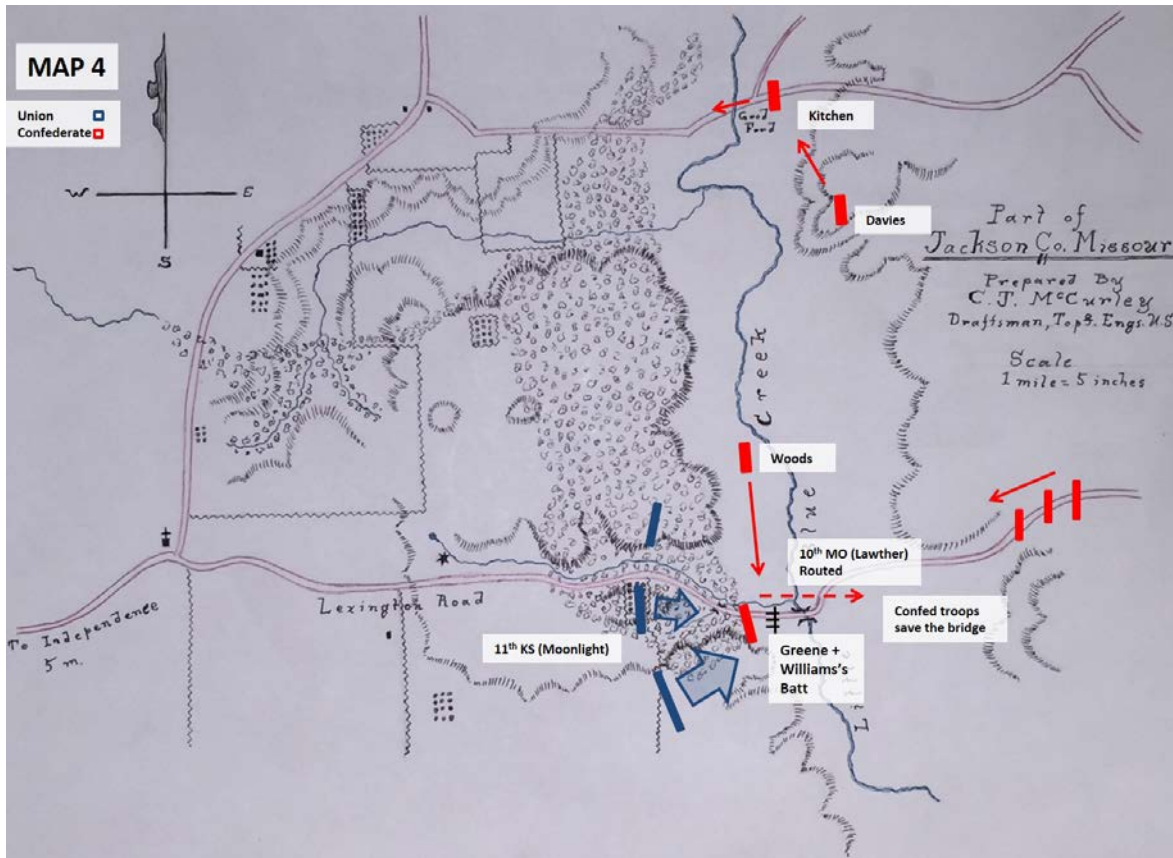


Figure 8. Greene's Stand, approx. 9:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.

Source: Overlays prepared by the author. Map used by permission of the artist, Cliff McCurley.

From all indications, Moonlight's main line of defense was somewhere along the bluffs just west of the river. Based on the location of the road and the bridge in 1864, his main line must have been along the southern ridge. Several accounts state that Moonlight's men were firing from the "summit" or "bluffs." It is clear that Moonlight's men with their repeating rifles made proper use of every piece of terrain and, as he stated, held every inch of ground as they were pushed westward.³³ Almost every Confederate

officer's report on the battle said that they were greatly outnumbered at the Little Blue, likely due to the increased volume of fire of Federal repeating rifles.³⁴

Private James H. Campbell of the 14th Missouri Cavalry, Robert Wood's Battalion, offered an indication of the intense fighting. Upon entering combat, his unit dismounted and went into position to the north of the road, to the right of Clark's Brigade. His regiment went up against the 15th Kansas Cavalry, 11th Kansas Cavalry, and 2nd Colorado Cavalry and stated: "we found them among the most stubborn and hardest fighters we had ever encountered in our experience in the war." Immediately after moving forward, the 14th Missouri was attacked, and both sides "fought like demons." After taking cover behind a tree, Campbell fired at close range with his breech-loading rifle until it looked as though he would have no time to reload and resorted to using his revolver. Some Union troopers took cover on the other side of his large tree, and both Campbell and those troopers attempted to shoot each other from around that tree. Later in the sea-saw battle, Campbell witnessed his colonel's horse get shot out from under him and his brother being wounded standing right next to him. He carried his brother through 30 or 40 yards of enemy fire to take cover at a log house. After the battle, he walked the fields and found many of his comrades had whiskey in their canteens, to which he attributed their courage that day.³⁵

Clark credited Greene with an extraordinary stand, holding off Federal attacks until the rest of the division came forward. The intensity of that fighting was notable, as Greene kept his flanks clear by firing canister and blank artillery rounds to drive the 11th Kansas back.³⁶ Greene was wounded significantly in this fight though it was not mentioned in reports of the engagement. The following day Captain Benjamin S. Johnson

reported taking Command of the 3rd Missouri Cavalry due to Greene's injuries.³⁷

Marmaduke himself was always near the action and was commended for gallantry by Price as he had two horses shot out from under him during the day.³⁸

With Marmaduke's division stalled, Price ordered Brigadier General Joseph Shelby up from the rear of the column to move up. Clearly, Price wanted to no further delays and bypassed Fagan's division, which was the next division in the line of march. Price wanted his best division commander to push forward to speed up the crossing of his army, understanding the danger in delay. Shelby moved forward with alacrity and dismounted his entire command except Lieutenant Colonel Nichols's Regiment. He had his men cross the river by wading, presumably to not waste time crossing downstream one-half mile away, and most likely crossing both above and below the bridge. Stating that he found Marmaduke outnumbered, Shelby quickly sent Brigadier General M. Jeff Thompson's brigade to the left with Colonel Sidney D. Jackman following behind in support. Thompson's report recalls pushing the Federal cavalry from one defensive position to another with Marmaduke's troops to his right, but with too much distance between the commands to be mutually supporting. This may have been due to the terrain or because of the disjointed effort of the attack.³⁹

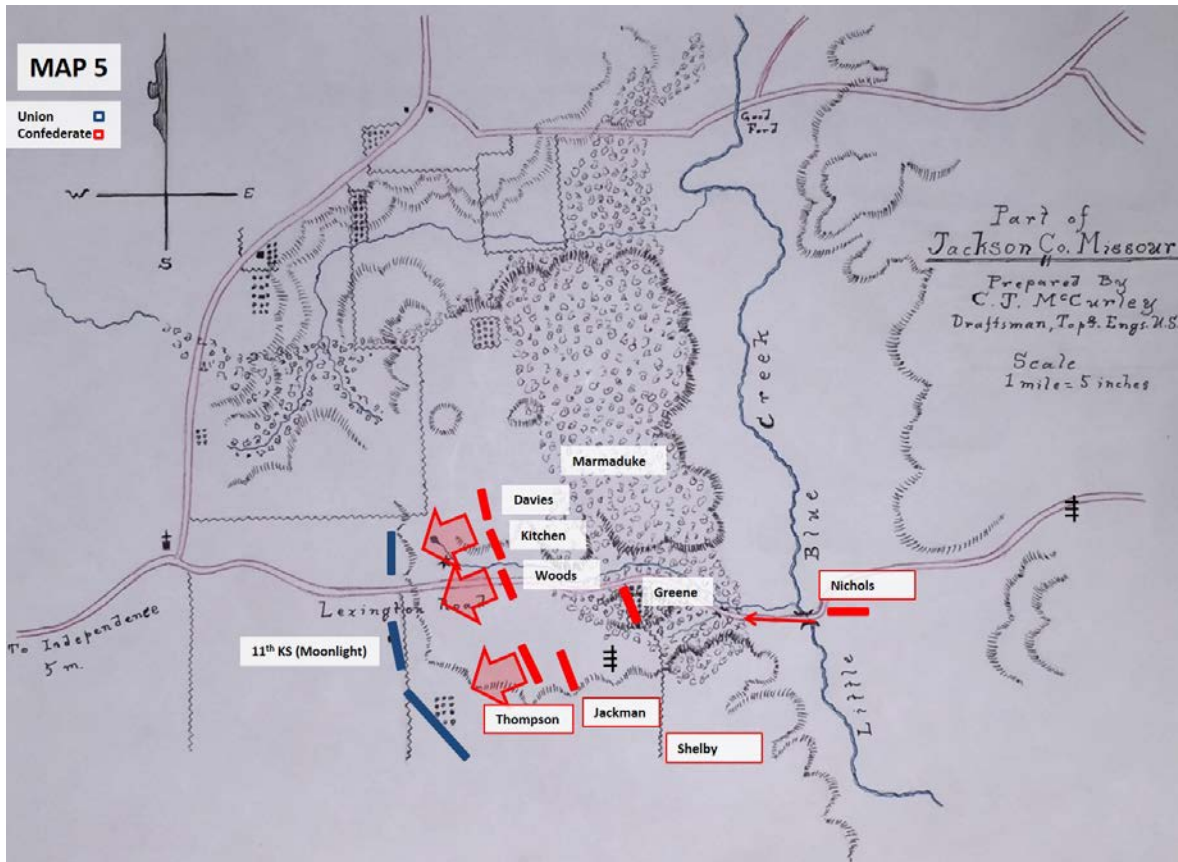


Figure 9. Close to the breaking point, approx. 10:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

Source: Overlays prepared by the author. Map used by permission of the artist, Cliff McCurley.

Shelby described the Federal defensive line as “a strong position behind hastily constructed works of logs and earth, stone fences, and deep hollows and ravines.” Shelby came up aggressively on Marmaduke’s left and began pushing Moonlight, fighting in timber and pushing him from “stand to stand.”⁴⁰ John Newman Edwards, who was Shelby’s chief of staff during the campaign, recalled: “the Federals took successive positions and fought from one to another with the stubbornness men always feel when shooting away without being shot at in return, for the shelter was equivalent to this.”⁴¹

Shelby waded a few pieces of artillery across the river, leading to additional speculation as to the condition of the bridge or its congestion.⁴² Together Marmaduke and Shelby pushed Moonlight steadily backward until he received reinforcements.⁴³ Blunt soon arrived on the scene; someone Shelby had met in combat several times previously and held his fighting skills in great esteem. In a discussion about the sharpness of the fighting at Lexington on the 19th, a group of Confederate officers expressed doubt that the men they encountered were under Blunt's Command. To this Shelby responded, "Well, gentlemen, all I have to say is that it was either Blunt or the Devil!"⁴⁴ Now Blunt was coming to the aid of Moonlight.

Meanwhile in Independence, Curtis may have changed his mind after a discussion with Blunt. He had recently given Blunt permission to take the majority of his command back to the Little Blue when word came of the ongoing engagement. At approximately 9 a.m., Curtis received word of the attack at the Little Blue and of the "accident" that the bridge had not been destroyed. Curtis expected that Moonlight would have been driven back before their arrival, and accompanied Blunt's command to assess the situation.⁴⁵ The force that they took to the Little Blue were the core veterans. Curtis detached the Kansas Militia that were present in Independence and set them to the defensive line at the Big Blue as previously planned. They departed Independence between approximately 9 and 10 a.m. and arrived at the Little Blue within the hour.⁴⁶

After over four hours of fighting Moonlight's small force began to feel the weight of Confederate numbers. His command slowly fell back to avoid being flanked, utilizing fences and walls for cover. They made counterattacks to keep the advancing Confederates off balance, but the situation became desperate. Despite the overwhelming

enemy numbers, Moonlight's casualties were light compared to his opponent. After falling back approximately a mile to the west, Moonlight took position along a north-south ridge near the Salem Church and the present-day intersection of North Blue Mills Road and Highway 24. Moonlight's position was just north of the Lexington-Independence Road along the ridgeline as Blunt's reinforcements arrived.⁴⁷

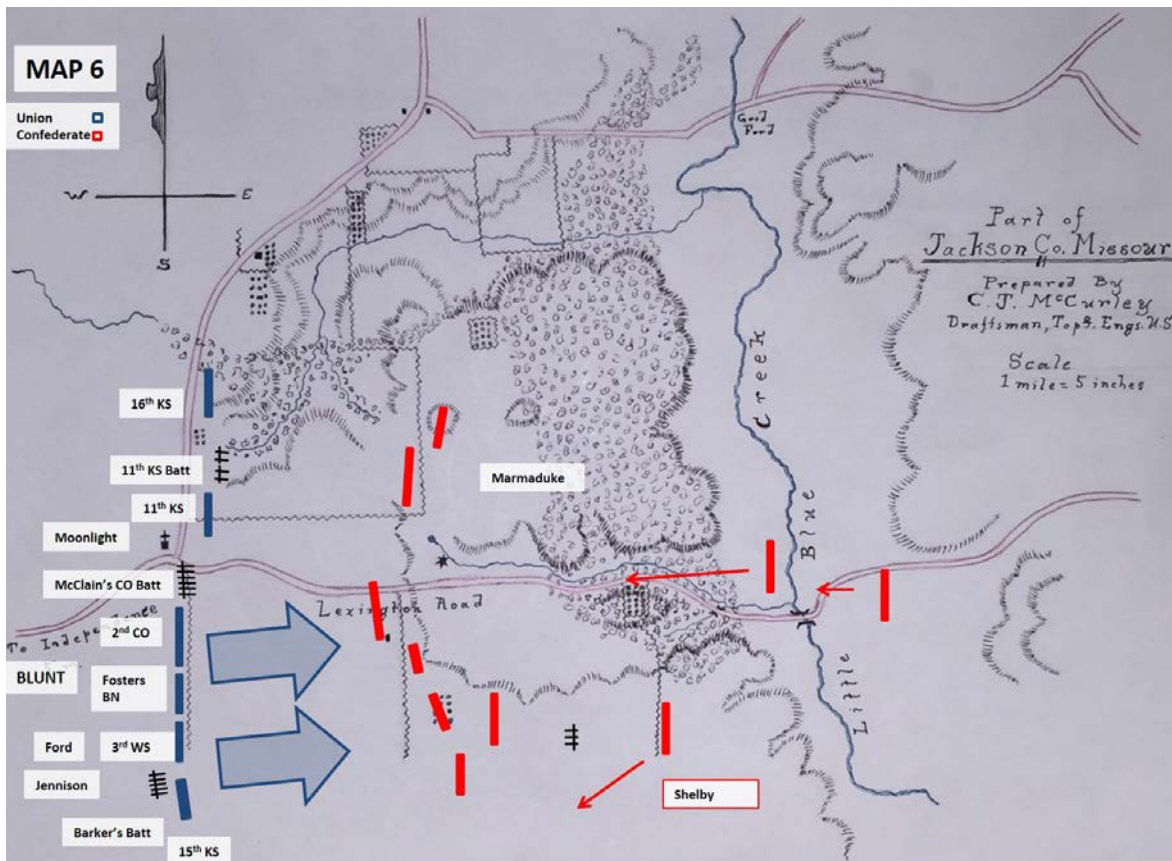


Figure 10. Blunt's counterattack, approx. 1 p.m.

Source: Overlays prepared by the author. Map used by permission of the artist, Cliff McCurley.

When Blunt arrived, he quickly assessed the situation and saw that Moonlight was making a gallant stand but no longer holding the strong defensive position just west of the crossing. Captain Richard Hinton, who arrived with the 2nd Colorado, said that the rebels had deployed north of the road and were swarming across the stream.⁴⁸ Blunt deployed his forces to the right of Moonlight's formation and dismounted his men in preparation for a counterattack to retake the good defensive line along the river. Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Walker with the 16th Kansas Cavalry and a battery of artillery was sent to bolster Moonlight's left flank (to the North). The Colorado Battery was positioned in the center with the 2nd Colorado to the right with the rest of Colonel James H. Ford's Brigade. To Ford's right was Colonel Charles R. Jennison's Brigade.⁴⁹

On the right of the Union line, Jennison's brigade was "fiercely" attacked as soon as they got into line. The nature of the ground and the timber in the area, though, provided protection.⁵⁰ Captain George S. Grover of Foster's Battalion was tasked by Jennison to support the 2nd Colorado battery, which his men did effectively with their Martin-Henry breech-loading rifles.⁵¹ After beating back the initial Confederate attack, the entire Union line advanced and drove the advancing Confederates back in confusion. Blunt's counterattack pushed the Confederates back approximately one mile. This advance retook the high ground just west of the river. However, more and more Confederate reinforcements arrived, extending their lines, and the superior numbers on his flanks halted Blunt before he could push them back to the river entirely.⁵²

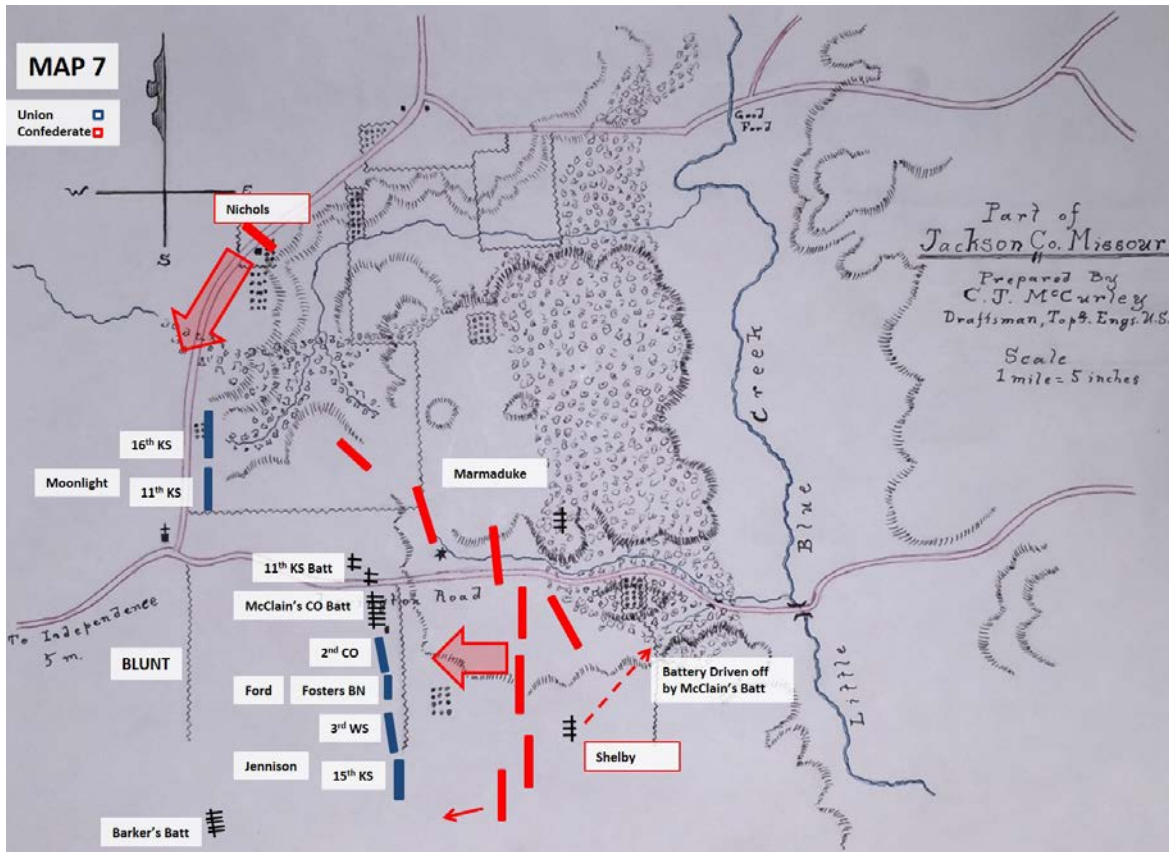


Figure 11. Prepared to withdraw, approx. 2 p.m. to 3 p.m.

Source: Overlays prepared by the author. Map used by permission of the artist, Cliff McCurley.

Captain W.D. McClain's Colorado "Independent" Battery was comprised of six rifled (Parrot) guns and was positioned in the center of the Union line, near the Lexington-Independence Road. After initially unlimbering near the Salem Church, they moved forward into another position in support of the counter attack.⁵³ Major Robert H Hunt, Curtis's Chief of Artillery, selected McClain's battery position.⁵⁴ Curtis directed Hunt to move forward two howitzers assigned to Curtis's personal guard detachment, as well as the two howitzers from the 11th Kansas. These were placed forward in an open

field and were exposed to enemy sharpshooters, so Hunt moved them into a position further forward to support the assault with cover of a nearby house. Hunt described intense fighting from this position where they used canister to drive back waves of rebels “like sheep.”⁵⁵ Hinton described the escort artillery being placed in the center of the line opposite a deep ravine of 700 yards in their immediate front where the Confederates were attempting to advance. Incoming Confederate artillery fire killed some of the horses and a shell fragment wounded Hunt. Nevertheless, the rifled guns of McClain’s battery drove off a four-gun Confederate battery while the howitzer sections directed by Hunt drove off waves of enemy advances. This was done from an exposed position while still receiving some small arms fire from rebel sharpshooters in the trees. Hinton stated that many of the sharpshooters were bushwhackers who joined Price at Lexington and were familiar with the local area.⁵⁶

Captain Grover, leading Foster’s Battalion (Missouri Volunteers), asked to accompany the party going to the aid of Moonlight. Foster’s battalion supported the Federal line in company-sized segments as a sort of reserve, being placed where needed. Grover’s company protected one of the artillery batteries near the center of the line by lying prone in front of the battery. Grover felt the confusion of the battle when ordered by a staff officer to pull his men to the rear and re-mount. This was done in good order in the face of the advancing Confederates. Once in the rear of the battery Jennison rode up and asked Grover why he had pulled back. After responding that a staff officer had told him to, Jennison countermanded the order and told him to return to where he had been. Despite his frustration, Grover moved his men back. Moonlight saw what had occurred and complemented him in his execution, “Captain, these are good men, I never saw

anything done better than that.” Blunt and Curtis also witnessed the incident, and complemented him. Grover described the attacking dismounted rebels as having Enfield rifles, which were long muzzle loading rifles unfit for cavalry use. He credited their advantage in firepower to their Martin-Henry breech loading rifles as a difference maker in the fighting. Grover explained that superior firepower enabled them to break the advancing rebels, and hold them in check with a relatively small force.⁵⁷

At some point during Blunt’s attack, Curtis repositioned the Union artillery, specifically the howitzers from the 11th Kansas. This may have been the movement of McClain’s Battery as well as the additional four howitzers to the exposed forward position. This was probably done in order to support the advance. They were emplaced along the high ground approximately a half-mile west of the river. This was frustrating for Blunt who described his dispositions being “interfered with” by Curtis, without relaying orders through him. At one point, Moonlight’s 11th Kansas had run out of ammunition, and Curtis had ordered the supply wagons to the rear. Infuriated, Blunt sent Captain Richard Hinton to find the ammo wagon and halt their movement toward Independence.⁵⁸

Once Blunt’s attack stalled, another Confederate counterattack began to push his lines. At about this time Major Nelson Smith of the 2nd Colorado Cavalry was killed.⁵⁹ This was one of the most emotional moments of the battle for the Federals as it was written about from many different perspectives. Smith was the acting commander of the 2nd Colorado Volunteer Cavalry, as their commander, Colonel James H. Ford, was the acting brigade commander. Many accounts were written in newspapers after the war, and few are the same. There are also several stories of Major Smith predicting to his friends

his pending death before the battle. In sifting through these accounts, it is most likely that Smith was killed not long before the general withdrawal to Independence began, just as the superior Confederate numbers started to take their toll.

The 2nd Colorado Cavalry saw some of the heaviest fighting during Blunt's counterattack and was near the center of the line, most likely defending the main avenue of approach along the Lexington-Independence Road. Captain George West, F Company 2nd Colorado, believed he was the last officer to whom Smith issued orders. They were in a skirmish line along a fence at the top of a hill when a large force of enemy cavalry advanced toward them at a gallop. Smith, standing next to West, said aloud, "There comes Shelby, hell-bent! Get your boys back on their horses and be ready for him." After riding away to carry out his order, West looked back in time to see Smith fall from his horse. No other battle of the war made a greater impression on him than the battle of the Little Blue, most likely due to the death of Smith.⁶⁰

A. C. Jones was a staff officer for Curtis, specifically the inspector of cavalry. He commented with reverence about the 2nd Colorado Cavalry, stating that half the companies had white horses, the other half black, and were always fighting the hardest in the hardest fights. He recalled being with Smith when he died as he had just delivered a message from Moonlight. According to Jones, Smith had a wounded right hand that prevented him from writing his response. In his account, both men were dismounted, (different from West's account) and Jones began writing Smith's dictated response. As he did, some artillery shells burst in their vicinity, spooking the horses. As his horse moved, Smith became exposed to enemy sharpshooter fire and was fatally struck.⁶¹ Other accounts state that he died charging into battle at the front of his unit, others describe him

dying later during the withdrawal. One account even has him in a head-to-head duel with the notorious rebel partisan George Todd. Regardless, it is clear that Smith's death was a significant event that the Union Soldiers present at the Little Blue clung to in their memories. It was also one of the singular highlights brought out in newspaper reports of the battle all across the Union (and even in the south) almost as though Major Nelson Smith was a nationally known figure.⁶²

At approximately three or four p.m., the Union line was in danger of envelopment on both ends. Lieutenant Colonel C.H. Nichols's Regiment from Jackman's Brigade was Shelby's only unit to stay mounted. Toward the end of the Union stand, Shelby sent Nichols to attack the Federal left flank, in what he called a "desperate" mounted charge.⁶³ This was the final stroke that broke Union resistance; Nichols's attack shattered the Union left and drove it back in confusion.⁶⁴ At about that time or perhaps earlier, Curtis began sending units to the rear. This was also the same time as the ammo supply wagon incident. However, the decision to withdrawal was timely, as all across the field the weight of the Confederate numbers was being felt. Curtis ordered Ford to provide the rear-guard for the withdrawal.

Moonlight's beleaguered 11th Kansas was short on ammunition and began to withdraw from a precarious position that was about to be outflanked. As he pulled his men out from behind the stonewall they defended, Moonlight directed Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Walker's 16th Kansas to hit the attackers and provide an enfilading fire to enable their withdrawal. This was all conducted successfully within close proximity to the enemy. At about this time Company H, under Captain Joel Huntoon rejoined the command. Unlike Greer, who fled at the first contact to the north, Captain Huntoon's

command had held their ford 'gallantly' until ordered to withdraw. Company H would later be critical in the retreat through Independence.⁶⁵

Private William A. Timbocker was a member of Company K, 11th Kansas. At about 3 p.m., their position behind stone walls was flanked, and they began to fall back. Just as the retreat was sounded, he was struck above his right eye by a Minie ball, knocking him unconscious. His captain believed he was dead and told him goodbye before hurrying to the rear. Union batteries on the hill to their rear, though, broke up the Confederate advance long enough for Timbocker to get back on his feet and make it to the rear eventually meeting back up with his unit. Upon seeing him alive the captain who had seen him fall earlier exclaimed- "Great God; the dead is alive!"⁶⁶

The Second Colorado Battery (McClain's Battery) had been moved to a position toward the rear as the Union lines begin their pullback. Most likely this position was near the crest of the hill near the Old Salem Church. Once the general withdrawal approached that position, they pulled their six guns further toward the rear, but become bogged down in a freshly plowed field to the north of the Lexington-Independence Road. The 11th Kansas, with Captain Henry Palmer, was withdrawing along the road when Moonlight stopped Palmer, and his company, and ordered them to countermarch and drive off the Confederates approaching the battery. Palmer did as instructed, advancing his company of 88 men in a column of eight front. They charged north along the Atherton Road, passing the church, and approached a brick house with stone fences in front.⁶⁷

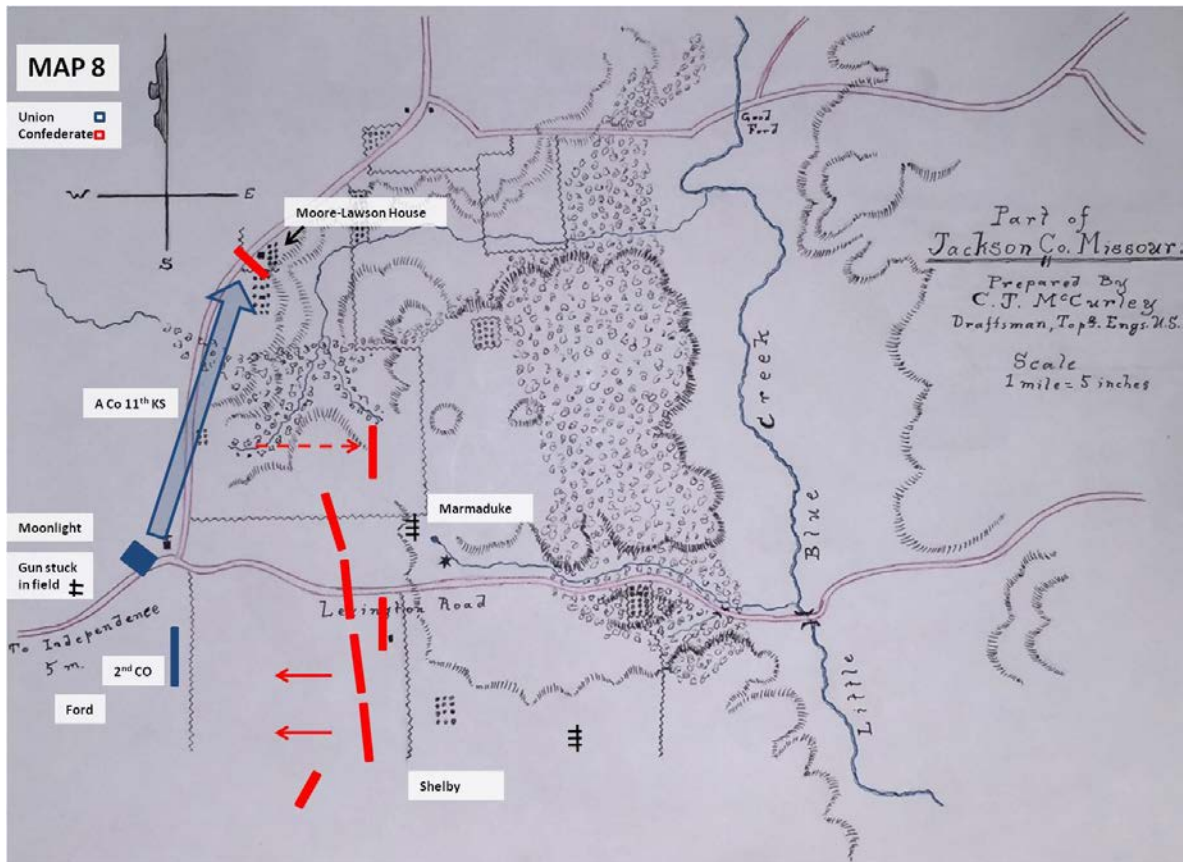


Figure 12. Palmer's attack, approx. 3 p.m.

Source: Overlays prepared by the author. Map used by permission of the artist, Cliff McCurley.

The mounted Confederates fled, but more were dismounted behind the walls and in the house. Palmer led his men at the front right of his column and as they approached the hill he instinctively hugged his saddle lying as low as he could. When the Confederates unleashed a volley Palmer's horse bucked, and many of the Soldiers in the front rank were hit. Although he safely landed on his horse's neck, Palmer's men assumed he was dead. They retreated into a hollow of trees, where Palmer rallied a group together. They made their way through an orchard to attack the brick house from another

direction. After driving the enemy from the house, they rushed and took the stone fence across the road. Despite this success, their position became precarious due to Confederate reinforcements. At that moment, the 2nd Colorado Cavalry arrived and assisted in their withdrawal, which they executed successfully. Palmer's account put Smith falling at the head of the 2nd Colorado as its members gallantly came to his aid. However, this does not seem to align with the majority of the other accounts relating to Smith's death. Regardless, Palmer and his men saved the Colorado battery from capture.⁶⁸

As the Federals withdrew, Marmaduke's worn-out division stopped to resupply ammunition, and Shelby's division began the pursuit. Confederate Dr. William McPheeters's journal of the engagement stated that once Shelby began the pursuit, dead Yankees were strewn along the road to Independence.⁶⁹ The Confederate pursuit was aggressive, just as it had been two days before from Lexington. However, the Federal cavalry had become adept at delaying rebel pursuit.

Union artillery directed by Major Hunt fired effectively from position to position as the column fell back, keeping the Rebels at a "respectful distance." Hunt was always in the most dangerous positions, and had two horses killed during the fighting and withdrawal. At one point, Hunt had to leave a set of harnesses (presumably on dead horses) because they were being pursued so closely. However, he expertly managed his guns, and as they neared Independence, the Confederate pursuit slackened due in large part to the effectiveness of the artillery. Hunt learned from prisoners after the battle that his battery had fired shells into a house some rebels were sheltering in at a distance of 600 yards, killing and wounding many.⁷⁰

Ford commanded the rear guard from the vicinity of the Little Blue back to Independence. He split his force in two, leapfrogging half his formation to the rear while the other half held the rebel advance in check. This technique in conjunction with Hunt's artillery fire was effective in ensuring a very orderly and methodical withdrawal toward Independence.⁷¹ Just northeast of Independence, the rear guard consolidated with the artillery along a ridgeline. McClain's battery set up to the right of the road as a heavy Confederate force pushed forward. Blunt took charge of the guns and once friendly forces had cleared his line of fire, opened on the advancing formation with devastating effect. A Federal counterattack then drove off the pursuers and provided more room for the withdrawal.⁷²

At around 6 p.m. Curtis sent Blunt a message telling him not to exhaust his troops and to fall back to the Big Blue. His instructions were to leave a small picket east of the river and let Price have Independence, as it was an untenable position. Curtis was concerned about the possibility of Blunt's forces being cut off or trapped and knew they would be essential in the following days' fighting.⁷³

Upon reaching Independence, the artillery moved out of town toward the Little Blue and without the threat of the howitzer fire the Confederates pushed forward again. Fighting became street to street as both Ford's and Moonlight's commands delayed the rebel advance to allow the evacuation of the city to be completed.⁷⁴ Grover observed the assault of a Confederate group led by the notorious Rebel partisan George Todd. Todd rode in the front of his men and was gunned down by three different men simultaneously. Hinton stated that Todd was the leader of the "Sam Gaty" massacre of 1863 when a number of contrabands were murdered in cold blood. Additionally, Todd was second in

command to partisan Captain William Quantrill at the massacres of Lawrence and Baxter Springs in August and October of 1863. To northerners Todd was a villain; to southerners, Todd was “a flower of southern manhood.”⁷⁵ However, for General Curtis this was a victory of sorts as he wrote his wife on 22 October, “It is certain that among the rebels killed yesterday the notorious Todd, one of the murderers of our son, was one among many who were killed.”⁷⁶

During the retreat through Independence, a woman fired from a window at the passing 2nd Colorado Cavalry and wounded an officer. This incensed many of the Union troopers who after the battle mentioned the incident in disgust.⁷⁷ This event highlighted the dangerous street to street fighting through Independence. Despite this danger, Moonlight personally directed the fighting withdrawal through the town with the 11th Kansas Cavalry. They continued to be pressed as they withdrew until they reached the railroad bridge to the southwest of Independence. At that point, the Confederates broke off the pursuit as darkness set in. It was after midnight before Blunt’s column crossed behind friendly lines at the Big Blue.⁷⁸

From approximately 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. Moonlight and Blunt had prevented Sterling Price’s entire army from advancing further than Independence. Casualty totals are difficult to ascertain because of such a wide variety of reports. Union casualties were initially reported around 200 killed, wounded, and missing total; however, after the war numbers were determined to be closer to 115 total.⁷⁹ Whatever the Federal total it is reasonable to assume the Confederate losses were approximately double. Confederate casualties were not reported because several commanders were captured in later battles, so their reports were not consolidated. It also appears many Confederate reports

underestimated their casualties significantly. No individual assessment provides an accurate picture, which is probably due to following events at Westport overshadowing the battle of the 21st.

The delaying action was a success for Curtis and the Army of the Border; however, the level of that success would not be fully understood until the subsequent day's events. Moonlight successfully delayed Price's entire army for almost half a day. Once Blunt arrived, that time extended until darkness ended the action. Essentially a small force of Union troopers successfully stalled Price's entire army. It is interesting to think how more significant a Union victory may have been achieved if Curtis's Army of the Border had been at the Little Blue where it would have been closer to equivalent numbers. Throughout the battle, it was clear that unified action of the Union chain of command was much more effective than the disjointed Confederate advance. Effective Union use of mission command in Moonlight's decision to make a stand, Blunt's assumption of risk in directing him to hold as long as possible, and Curtis's timely decision to withdrawal set the conditions for victory at Westport on 22 and 23 October.

¹ Mark A. Lause, *The Collapse of Price's Raid: The Beginning of the End in the Civil War in Missouri* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2016), 77.

² United States War Department, "General Curtis's Report, January 1865," in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (hereafter referred to as OR) (Washington, DC: Government Print Official, 1893), 41, Part 1, 476.

³ United States War Department, "General Blunt's Report, 24 December 1864," in OR, 41, Part 1, 574.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ James G. Blunt, "General Blunt's Account of His Civil War Experiences," *The Kansas Historical Quarterly* (May 1932): 255.

⁶ Kip Lindberg et al., eds., "The Eagle of the 11th Kansas," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* (2003): 55; Blunt, "General Blunt's Account of His Civil War Experiences," 255; United States War Department, "Colonel Moonlight's Report, 15 December 1864," in OR, 41, Part 1, 592.

⁷ United States War Department, "Colonel Moonlight's Report, 15 December 1864," in OR, 41, Part 1, 592.

⁸ United States War Department, "Senator Lane's Report," in OR, 41, Part 1, 568.

⁹ Lindberg, "The Eagle of the 11th Kansas," 35.

¹⁰ Richard J. Hinton, *Rebel Invasion of Missouri and Kansas* (Leavenworth, KS: Church and Goodman, 1865), 93.

¹¹ John. B. Hart, "Sweet Potatoes and Other Stories," in *Under Moonlight in Missouri: Kansans Repel Price's Raid*, ed. J. Hart (Colorado: 1919), 5.

¹² United States War Department, "Colonel Moonlight's Report, 15 December 1864," in OR, 41, Part 1, 592-593.

¹³ Hart, "Sweet Potatoes and Other Stories," 5.

¹⁴ A. S. Childers, "Recitals and Reminiscences," *National Tribune*, 31 January 1907, 6.

¹⁵ Henry E. Palmer, "The Soldiers of Kansas," in G. W. Martin, *Kansas State Historical Society* vol 9 (Topeka: State Printing Office, 1905-1906), 439.

¹⁶ United States War Department, "General Clark's Report, 19 December 1864," in OR, 41, Part 1, 682.

¹⁷ Palmer, "The Soldiers of Kansas," 439.

¹⁸ United States War Department, "Colonel Moonlight's Report, 15 December 1864," in OR, 41, Part 1, 592.

¹⁹ Childers, "Recitals and Reminiscences," 6.

²⁰ Palmer, "The Soldiers of Kansas," 439.

²¹ United States War Department, "General Clark's Report, 19 December 1864," in OR, 41, Part 1, 682.

²² Lindberg, “The Eagle of the 11th Kansas,” 35; Hinton, “Rebel Invasion of Missouri and Kansas,” 93.

²³ United States War Department, “Colonel Moonlight’s Report, 15 December 1864,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 592; United States War Department, “General Clark’s Report, 19 December 1864,” 682.

²⁴ United States War Department, “Colonel Moonlight’s Report, 15 December 1864,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 592.

²⁵ United States War Department, “General Clark’s Report, 19 December 1864,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 682.

²⁶ Hart, “Sweet Potatoes and Other Stories,” 6.

²⁷ United States War Department, “General Price’s Report, 28 December 1864,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 634.

²⁸ United States War Department, “General Curtis’s Report, January 1865,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 476.

²⁹ Childers, “Recitals and Reminiscences,” 6.

³⁰ Hinton, *Rebel Invasion of Missouri and Kansas*, 95.

³¹ United States War Department, “General Clark’s Report, 19 December 1864,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 682.

³² United States War Department, “General Clark’s Report, 19 December 1864,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 682-683; United States War Department, “Colonel Greene’s Report, 18 December 1864,” 690.

³³ T. A. Belser, *Military Operations in Missouri and Arkansas, 1861-1865* (Nashville, Tennessee: Vanderbilt University, 1958), 722; John N. Edwards, *Shelby and His Men: The War in the West* (Cincinnati: Miami Printing and Publishing Co, 1867), 420; Lindberg, “The Eagle of the 11th Kansas,” 35; W. M. McPheeters, “I Acted From Principle,” in *The Civil War Diary of Dr. William M. McPheeters, Confederate Surgeon in the Trans-Mississippi*, ed. C. D. Pitcock, and B. J. Gurley (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2002), 234.

³⁴ George S. Grover, “The Price Campaign of 1864, George S. Grover, Captain, Foster’s Cavalry Battalion, Missouri [US] Volunteers,” in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War Volume 6*, ed. P. Cozzens (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 440.

³⁵ James H. Campbell, "Reminiscence of James H. Campbell's Experiences During the Civil War," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* (1917): 168-169.

³⁶ United States War Department, "Colonel Greene's Report, 18 December 1864," in OR, 41, Part 1, 687; United States War Department, "General Clark's Report, 19 December 1864," 683.

³⁷ United States War Department, "Captain Johnson's Report," 693.

³⁸ United States War Department, "General Price's Report, 28 December 1864," 634; Campbell, "Reminiscence of James H. Campbell's Experiences," 169.

³⁹ United States War Department, "General Thompson's Report, 24 November 1864," in OR, 41, Part 1, 666; Paul B. Jenkins, *The Battle of Westport* (Kansas City, MO: Franklin Hudson Publishing Co., 1906), 420.

⁴⁰ United States War Department, "General Shelby's Report, December 1864," in OR, 41, Part 1, 657.

⁴¹ Edwards, *Shelby and His Men*, 420.

⁴² Belser, "Military Operations in Missouri and Arkansas," 722.

⁴³ Edwards, *Shelby and His Men*, 421.

⁴⁴ Jenkins, *The Battle of Westport*, 55.

⁴⁵ Blunt, "General Blunt's Account of His Civil War Experiences," 256; United States War Department, "General Curtis's Report, January 1865," in OR, 41, Part 1, 476.

⁴⁶ Hinton, *Rebel Invasion of Missouri and Kansas*, 95.

⁴⁷ United States War Department, "Colonel Moonlight's Report, 15 December 1864," in OR, 41, Part 1, 592.

⁴⁸ Hinton, *Rebel Invasion of Missouri and Kansas*, 94.

⁴⁹ United States War Department, "Colonel Moonlight's Report, 15 December 1864," in OR, 41, Part 1, 592; United States War Department, "Major Hunt's Report, in OR, 41, Part 1, 22 November 1864," 543; United States War Department, "Colonel Ford's Report, December 1864," in OR, 41, Part 1, 607; United States War Department, "Colonel Jennison's Report, 23 November 1864," in OR, 41, Part 1, 583.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, "Colonel Jennison's Report, 23 November 1864," 583.

⁵¹ Grover, "The Price Campaign of 1864," 440.

⁵² United States War Department, "General Blunt's Report, 24 December 1864," in OR, 41, Part 1, 574; Blunt, "General Blunt's Account of His Civil War Experiences," 256; United States War Department, "Colonel Ford's Report, December 1864," in OR, 41, Part 1, 607.

⁵³ Bryce A. Suderow, "McLain's Battery and Price's 1864 Invasion: A Letter from Lt. Caleb S. Burdsal, Jr.," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* (1983): 43-44; Hinton, *Rebel Invasion of Missouri and Kansas*, 97.

⁵⁴ United States War Department, "Major Hunt's Report, 22 November 1864," in OR, 41, Part 1, 542.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 543.

⁵⁶ Hinton, *Rebel Invasion of Missouri and Kansas*, 96-97; Jenkins, *The Battle of Westport*, 58.

⁵⁷ Grover, "The Price Campaign of 1864," 439-440; Jenkins, *The Battle of Westport*, 61.

⁵⁸ Blunt, "General Blunt's Account of His Civil War Experiences," 256; Hinton, *Rebel Invasion of Missouri and Kansas*, 100.

⁵⁹ Hinton, *Rebel Invasion of Missouri and Kansas*, 97.

⁶⁰ George West, "The Second Colorado. Some Further Reminiscences of a Famous Cavalry Regiment," *National Tribune*, 22 February 1883, 3.

⁶¹ A. C. Jones, "The Boy Inspector of Cavalry," *National Tribune*, 25 January 1883, 2.

⁶² Childers, "Recitals and Reminiscences," 6; H. Ward, "Price's Raid. How Major Smith of the Independent Colorado Met His Death," *National Tribune*, 29 March 1883, 2; Jones, "The Boy Inspector of Cavalry," 2; West, "The Second Colorado," 3; Jenkins, *The Battle of Westport*, 58; City of Kansas Daily Journal, "Fight on the Little Blue," in *Gettysburg of the West: The Battle of Westport 1864*, ed. F. L. Lee (Kansas City: 1864), 22.

⁶³ United States War Department, "General Shelby's Report, December 1864," in OR, 41, Part 1, 657.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, "General Jackman's Report," 675.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, "Colonel Moonlight's Report, 15 December 1864," 593; Hinton, *Rebel Invasion of Missouri and Kansas*, 99.

⁶⁶ William A. Timbocker, “On Kansas Soil,” *National Tribune*, 21 November 1895, 1.

⁶⁷ This brick house is believed to be the Moore-Lawson house, matches Palmer’s description of the House on the right of the road (present day North Blue Mills Road) where the road turns northerly to easterly.

⁶⁸ Palmer, “The Soldiers of Kansas,” 439-440.

⁶⁹ United States War Department, “General Price’s Report, 28 December 1864,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 634; United States War Department, “General Shelby’s Report, December 1864,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 657; Edwards, *Shelby and His Men*, 421.

⁷⁰ United States War Department, “Major Hunt’s Report, 22 November 1864,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 543; Suderow, “McLain’s Battery and Price’s 1864 Invasion,” 44.

⁷¹ United States War Department, “Colonel Ford’s Report, December 1864,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 607-608.

⁷² Hinton, *Rebel Invasion of Missouri and Kansas*, 101.

⁷³ United States War Department, “General Curtis’s Message to Blunt,” in OR, 41, Part 4, 165.

⁷⁴ Lindberg, “The Eagle of the 11th Kansas,” 35-36.

⁷⁵ Hinton, *Rebel Invasion of Missouri and Kansas*, 105; Jenkins, *The Battle of Westport*, 73.

⁷⁶ United States War Department, “General Curtis’s letter to his wife,” in OR, 41, Part 4, 190. Curtis’s son, Henry Z. Curtis, was killed at the Baxter Springs Massacre.

⁷⁷ Jenkins, *The Battle of Westport*, 72; Hinton, *Rebel Invasion of Missouri and Kansas*, 104.

⁷⁸ United States War Department, “Colonel Moonlight’s Report, 15 December 1864,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 593; Lindberg, “The Eagle of the 11th Kansas,” 36.

⁷⁹ Hinton, *Rebel Invasion of Missouri and Kansas*, 203; F. H. Dyer, *A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion: Compiled and Arranged from Official Records of the Federal and Confederate Armies Reports of the Adjutant Generals of the Several States, the Army Registers and Other Reliable Documents and Sources* (Des Moines, IA: Dyer Publishing Company, 1908), 813.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

The events that unfolded along the Little Blue on 21 October was part of three days of fighting that culminated on 23 October at the Battle of the Westport. However, the events along the Little Blue were critical to the decisive defeat of the Confederate Army of Missouri at that battle. Union leadership at the Battle of the Little Blue unconsciously demonstrated the Mission Command philosophy of using “mission orders,” and the commander’s intent to allow agile and adaptive leaders to achieve the desired results. Furthermore, these Union leaders demonstrated fundamentals of Mission Command when they accepted prudent risk and exercised mutual trust in order to allow their subordinates to exercise disciplined initiative in adapting to changing situations. Curtis, Blunt, and Moonlight each had a hand in demonstrating the successful employment of the philosophy of Mission Command, and in doing so enabled the decisive defeat of Price’s raid into Missouri in 1864. These examples of the use of Mission Command are applicable to leaders today and provide an excellent illustration of how this philosophy can be best employed in a combat situation.

After the conclusion of combat operations on 21 October 1864, Price and his Army of Missouri were encamped around Independence with their massive 500-plus wagon train. To the east, Major General Alfred Pleasonton with the Cavalry Division of the Union Department of Missouri was near Lexington, Missouri, a short day’s march from Independence. To his west, Curtis and his Army of the Border were posted along the west side of the Big Blue River in a defensive line focused on the northern portion of the river, which guarded the main avenue of approach toward Kansas Town, or what

became Kansas City, Missouri. Curtis's defensive line occupied the terrain from the confluence of the Big Blue and the Missouri River all the way south to the vicinity of Hickman's Mills, approximately 15 miles.¹ Price knew that Curtis was defending the main approaches toward Kansas City, and he was aware of Pleasonton closing on his rear. Therefore, he made the decision to move southwest from Independence to cross the Big Blue at Byram's Ford, hoping to attack the southern flank of Curtis's line. Price intended to cross the Big Blue with all of his wagons before Pleasonton could get close enough to attack his rear.²

While Price sent demonstrations toward Curtis's main defensive line on the road to Kansas City, he also sent Brig. Gen. Joseph O. Shelby's division south to attack and seize Byram's Ford.³ After a stalemate that lasted from approximately 11:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. Brig. Gen. Jeff Thompson and his men attacked Byram's Ford, defended by Union forces commanded by Colonel Charles Jennison. Thompson's frontal assaults were unsuccessful; however, late in the day, the Confederates flanked Jennison's positions and forced his withdrawal. After his command successfully crossed the river, Shelby moved north toward Westport and engaged Blunt, who was attempting to halt the Confederate breakthrough from Byram's Ford. On the open prairie south of Brush Creek, Blunt halted Shelby's advance before nightfall. Once Byram's Ford was secured, the large rebel column moved southeast from Independence and crossed over the Big Blue River.⁴

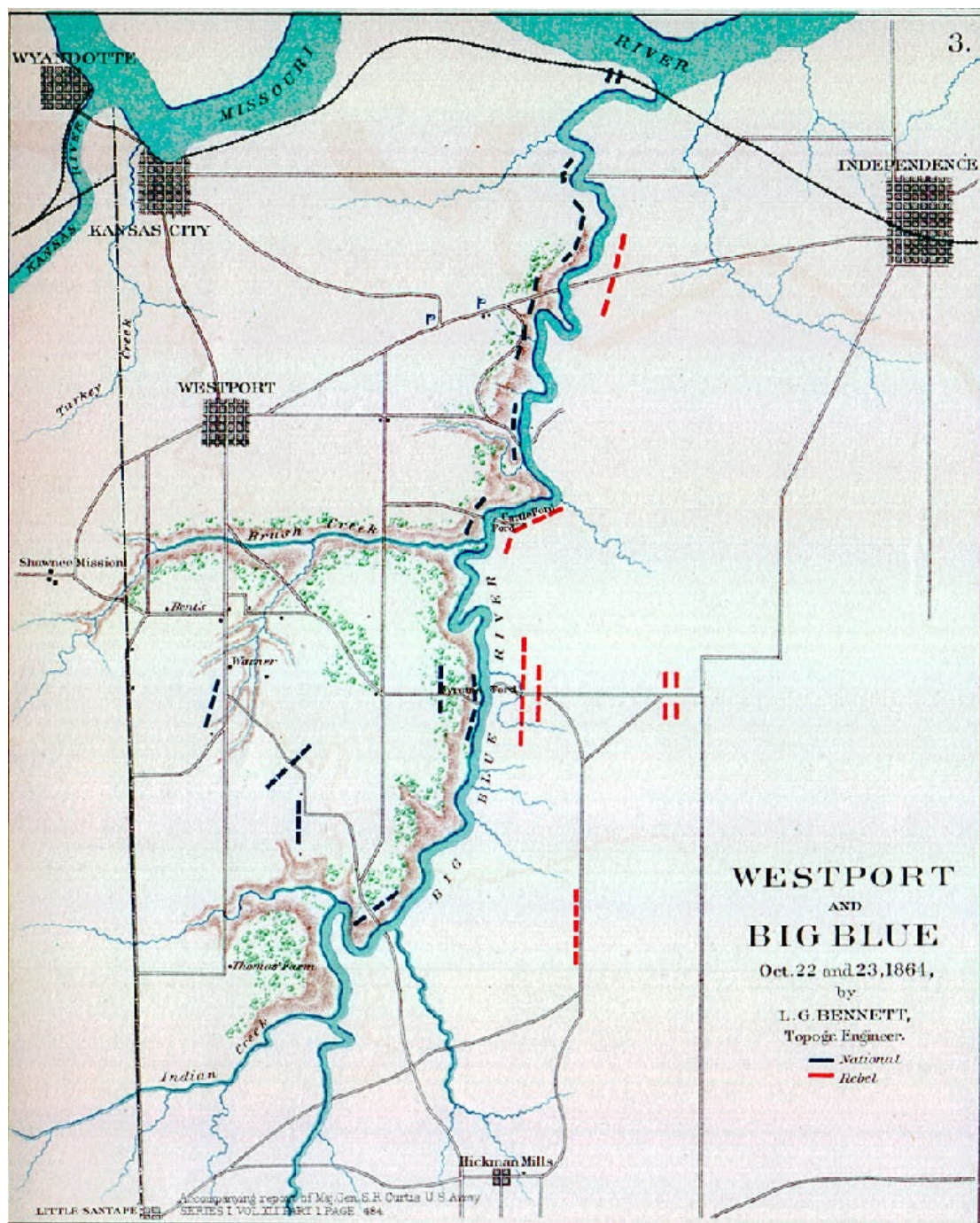


Figure 13. 22 October 1864

Source: United States War Department, *Atlas to Accompany the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC: Government Print Official, 1891-1895), plate 66.

At the same time the fight for Byram's Ford was in progress, Pleasonton's lead elements forced the crossing of the Little Blue, where the previous day's fighting had taken place, and pressed Price's rear. Pleasonton continued a rapid pursuit of Price's column, attacking and driving off Confederate rear elements in Independence, capturing two cannons and some 300 prisoners. A running fight continued between Marmaduke's Confederate rear guard, and Pleasonton's lead elements. This action continued until just east of the vicinity of Byram's Ford, until the pursuit ended at about 10:30 p.m. Despite his rear being heavily engaged, Price moved all of his wagons successfully across the ford and reconsolidated his forces.⁵

On the evening of 22 October, the Confederate army and both Union armies made plans for the following day. After initially withdrawing his troops toward Kansas City, Curtis made the decision to reposition north of Brush Creek and launch an attack on Price the following morning. After a day of aggressive pursuit, Pleasonton planned to attack and cross Byram's Ford as soon as first light the following day in order to continue to put pressure on Price. Meanwhile, Price's greatest concern was his excessive wagon train and ordered them to move south toward Hickman's Mills at dawn. Price ordered Marmaduke to hold Pleasonton at Byram's Ford while Shelby attacked Curtis near Westport, in order to delay both from pursuit.⁶

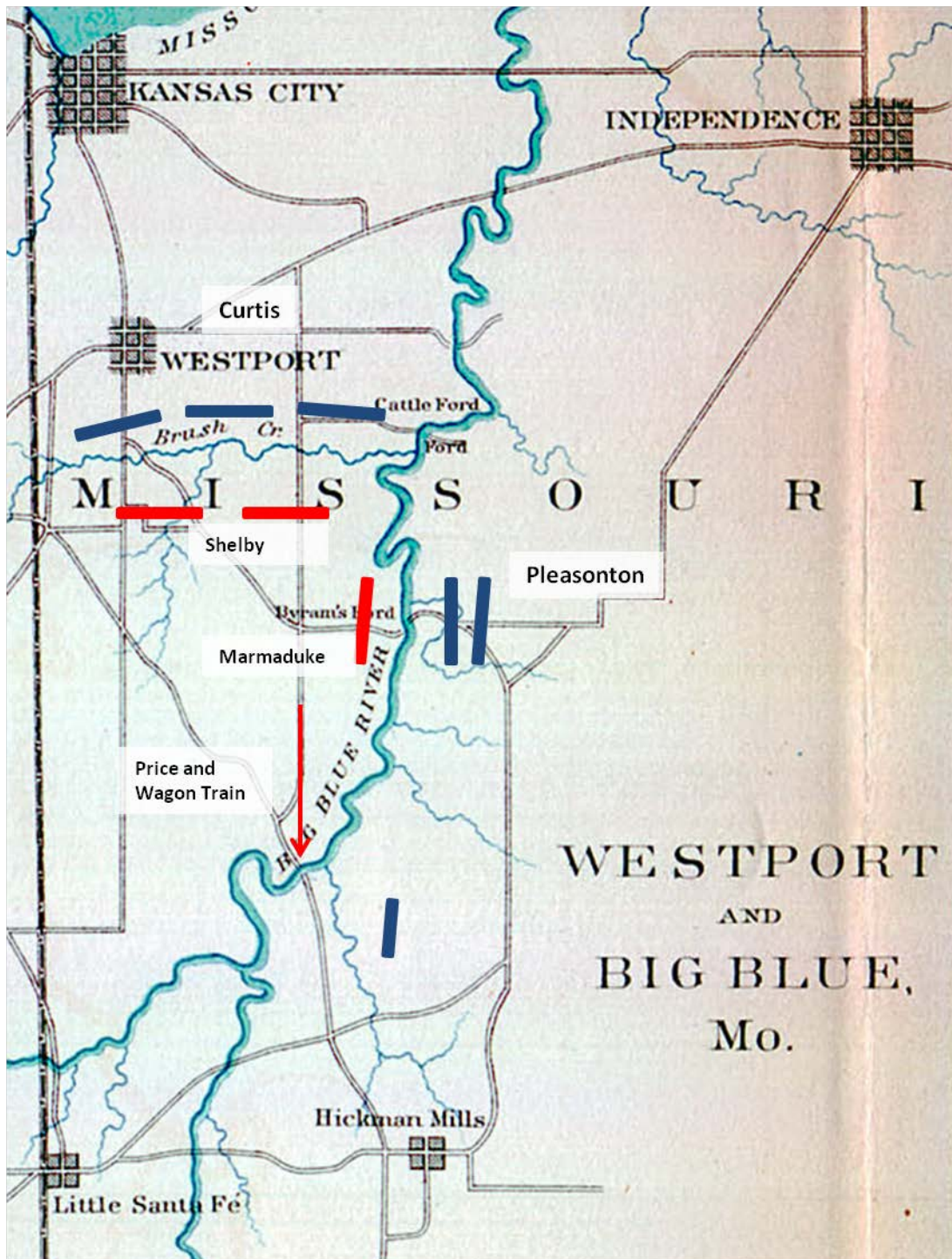


Figure 14. 23 October 1864

Source: United States War Department, *Atlas to Accompany the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC: Government Print Official, 1891-1895), plate 66. Overlay drawn by author.

The next morning, Blunt's initial advance moved south of Brush Creek at about 7:00 a.m. and, at first, made its way southward for a substantial distance. However, this success was short lived when Shelby's division arrived and forced Blunt back north of Brush Creek.⁷ The Confederates held Curtis's forces on the north side of Brush Creek for most of the morning. At about the same time as Blunt's attack began, Price started his wagon train moving south toward Hickman's Mills. Meanwhile, an irate Pleasonton relieved one of his Missouri Militia Brigade Commanders for not commencing the attack at Byram's Ford at dawn and finally got the attack started at around 9:00 a.m.⁸

At approximately 11:00 a.m., after little progress was achieved in breaking through the Confederate line above Brush Creek, Curtis received information from a local farmer about a ravine on the Confederate left flank and led a successful flank attack. This enabled Curtis to slowly push Shelby, and the majority of Price's Army, south. Between 12:00 and 1:00 p.m. Confederate General Fagan's division was sent to Marmaduke's assistance at Byram's Ford, as the latter was being driven back by Pleasonton. However, it was too late. Pleasonton had already broken Marmaduke's line and was rapidly moving north to support Curtis. By approximately 1:00 p.m. Pleasonton's lead elements had attacked Shelby's right flank, starting a general Confederate retreat south.⁹

Earlier that morning, Pleasonton dispatched Brigadier General John McNeil south to intercept any attempts by the Confederate column to move south toward Hickman's Mills. McNeil was in position to interdict the Confederate wagon train, but was afraid of attacking the column, believing he faced the entire Confederate army. In truth, only two Confederate brigades were with the long wagon train, but they were comprised almost

entirely of unarmed newly conscripted volunteers. Owing to McNeil's blunder, Price's wagon train continued to move south and escaped capture that day.¹⁰

Price moved his army, and all his wagons south to Hickman's Mills then recrossed the Big Blue River and linked up with the majority of his retreating army near Little Santa Fe. It was late afternoon when this occurred, and Price continued retreating southward along the Kansas-Missouri border.¹¹ Federal cavalry from both Pleasanton's and Curtis's armies were in hot pursuit as the day ended. Price's army had been decisively defeated but not destroyed. The pursuit would continue south through Kansas and Missouri.

A few days later, on 25 October, Price's column was held up while attempting to move wagons across Mine Creek. The fords became mud bogs from too many wagons crossing at too few points, creating a tremendous delay in the river crossing. Furthermore, civilians fleeing with the column created additional congestion at the crossing sites. The lead Federal elements aggressively attacked, seeing an opportunity to trap a large number of Confederate forces as well as their supplies and artillery. Despite superior Confederate numbers, the poor morale of the retreating column led to a mass retreat at the opening of the Federal attack. The Federals captured a large force, including some wagons and artillery, as well as Generals Marmaduke and Cabell.¹²

Despite these losses, Price escaped and continued to withdraw southward. For the next few weeks, Price's ragged column was harassed and pursued by Federal forces, with the Rebels suffering additional defeats along the way. On 8 November, Price crossed the Arkansas River in Indian Territory, and Curtis called off his pursuit. At that point, Price's

remaining force was but a shadow of its former glory and was disbanded as a single entity.¹³

The action at the Little Blue on 21 October did exactly what the Union army needed it to do; delay Price's progress west and provide time for Pleasonton to catch up to the rear of his column. Had this not been accomplished it is possible that Price could have defeated Curtis's army in a one-on-one fight. Alternatively, Price may have chosen to avoid Curtis completely after the action on 22 October and headed south with his army and spoils of war intact. Despite the fact that Price's army was not destroyed at the Battle of Westport, his army was decisively defeated and irreparably damaged during the subsequent pursuit.

Unbeknownst to the Union leaders involved at the Little Blue; they demonstrated a good example of the application of the modern philosophy of Mission Command. Each of the commanders that played a role in the Little Blue were leaders of ability. Before discussing specific examples of their illustration of this philosophy, it is important to understand their character. Each of them were hard fighting veteran officers with considerable combat experience. Their ability to unconsciously utilize Mission Command came from their experience fighting alongside their men in battle. There are numerous examples of their exceptional personal conduct during the fighting along the Little Blue as well as the Battle of Westport.

Curtis was a solid commander of considerable reputation for his successes in the trans-Mississippi theater of the war, most notably his victory at the Battle of Pea Ridge, Arkansas, in early March 1862. At the time of Price's Raid, he was more or less at the pinnacle of his ability as a commander. He had a vivid understanding of the strengths and

limitations of his Army of the Border. During the fighting along the Little Blue, Curtis led by example, moving from place to place where the fighting was thickest, encouraging his men and helping with tactical and logistical dispositions. It is noteworthy that in Curtis's personal bodyguard, Company G of the 11th Kansas Cavalry, 15 of the 40 horses in the escort were killed. This demonstrated the closeness with which Curtis personally monitored combat operations, to a degree that was uncommon in his era. Consider that his opponent, Price, was likely nowhere near the front of the action at any point during the battle of Westport.¹⁴

Several accounts of the Battle of Westport place Curtis at points of danger throughout the battle. They describe his fearlessness in exposing himself in the face of the enemy. On the last day of the Battle of Westport, Curtis personally led the flank movement that broke the initial Confederate line along Brush Creek. Curtis was an inspiration on the battlefield, not just an Army commander who issued orders from a distance. Senator Lane commended Curtis at the Little Blue as being "constantly under fire, directing movements, and inspiring by his own example his greatly inferior force."¹⁵

Blunt, like Curtis, was a leader who had a great deal of hard fighting experience west of the Mississippi during the war. Blunt also was no stranger to danger, and his hard fighting demeanor made him appear as though he had no fear. At the Little Blue, he too inspired his Soldiers' determined stand against Price's army. Curtis commended Blunt in his report on that day as "active and efficient" recommending his report for his command to read in order to do him justice. Lane described Blunt as the "bravest of the brave."¹⁶ Captain Richard Hinton said the following about Blunt's performance at the Little Blue:

General Blunt, with the members of his staff, was everywhere at the front, encouraging and directing the movements. Cheering the men with the tenacity so characteristic of this officer, and with usual seemingly reckless, but cool audacity, exposing himself to the storm of bullets, he was the animating spirit of the battle. His presence was inspiring, and as the men regarded him, they ceased to heed the whistling shot and screaming shell, which fell and exploded all about them.¹⁷

Blunt fought alongside his men throughout the Missouri Campaign and endured hardships with them. During the retreat toward Independence, Blunt personally took charge of an artillery battery and artfully commanded its rapid fire in order to stymie the Confederate pursuit.¹⁸ Blunt was a warrior, and his men seemed to take on his persona just as a football team might that of their head coach.

Moonlight too led by personal example in some of the hardest fighting during the Battle of Westport. Curtis praised Moonlight as “exceedingly gallant.”¹⁹ Blunt highlighted Moonlight in his report and requested a special commendation for his actions at the Little Blue.²⁰ Moonlight was engaged for the entire period of daylight on 21 October and made the most daring military stand of the campaign. He fought side-by-side with his men and inspired them by his example from the early fighting along the river bluffs to the street to street fighting in Independence. *The Kansas Daily Journal* stated in its report on the battle: “Colonel Moonlight, of the 11th Kansas, won universal admiration by his coolness and skill. The boys of the 2nd Colorado are loud in his praise.”²¹

Each leader was a fighter who endured hardships and fought alongside their men. Talented leadership utilizes experience in developing future courses of action. It is no surprise that these leaders demonstrated the Mission Command philosophy. When it came to the application of the philosophy of Mission Command, it began with the example of Curtis.

As an army commander facing numerous challenges, Curtis was equal to the task. In early October, when faced with Price's advancing army, Curtis relied on and trusted Blunt to execute his intent. Curtis and Blunt shared a mutual understanding of the campaign's goals of stopping Price from entering Kansas and allowing Pleasonton's force to catch up with Price's rear. Curtis sent Blunt, with his regular volunteers, into Missouri well to the front of the bulk of his army, in order to make contact with Price's column. Curtis accepted prudent risk by allowing Blunt to be adaptive and agile at the point of attack. Both of these veteran commanders understood that the critical point where decisions are made is at the front lines in combat situations.

At the Little Blue, Curtis communicated his intent to Blunt, that the Big Blue was where he intended to make his stand and directed him to delay Price's crossing of the river before withdrawing to the main defensive line. His intent was broad enough for his subordinates to make tactical decisions but focused enough to provide overall mutual understanding. It was disciplined initiative within Curtis's intent that allowed Moonlight and Blunt the freedom necessary to hold Price when the opportunity presented itself.

Despite a difference of opinion in strategy, Curtis listened to Blunt and gave him permission to reinforce Moonlight along the Little Blue before receiving word of the ongoing battle.²² Curtis himself showed a willingness to listen to his subordinate commanders as well as his own ability to adapt as necessary to the tactical situation. Curtis again displayed his trust in Blunt by granting him permission to reinforce Moonlight rather than ordering an immediate withdrawal from the river.

Curtis could have changed the course of the day's events at any point by ordering an immediate withdrawal. The report he received about the bridge, over the Little Blue,

not being destroyed would have appeared to create a situation where a faster withdrawal toward the Big Blue was prudent. However, he had trust and confidence in both Blunt and Moonlight, which he demonstrated by allowing the situation to develop. The fact that Curtis did not have a “knee-jerk” reaction to the situation speaks volumes to his tactical patience; perhaps this was due to his experience as a combat leader.

During the battle, Curtis allowed his subordinates to command their formations and only intervened, it seemed, when he saw a potential issue that needed to be addressed immediately. His movement of the artillery in the later stages of the Little Blue battle might have been prudent even though it is debatable if it was effective.²³ Blunt later complained that Curtis interfered with his dispositions of his artillery. However, his frustration appeared to be mostly about the failure to utilize the chain of command.²⁴ However, the bypassing of the chain of command can cause a misunderstanding in a combat situation where there is already enough confusion. Later in the battle, Curtis’s movement of the artillery to the rear appeared to come at critical moments when the artillery might have been lost or irreparably damaged, which can be argued were prudent decisions.

Curtis’s biggest mistake at the Little Blue may have been when he ordered ammunition to the rear at a time when the 11th Kansas was becoming critically low on their supply. Most likely, he did this because he was attempting to expedite the withdrawal due to concerns that Blunt’s force might become outflanked. Mistakes like this occur when the commanding general of an army gets too involved tactically and begins to micro-manage his subordinates. This is exactly what the philosophy of Mission Command is designed to avoid; however, in the big picture of the day’s events, these

were not detrimental to the overall outcome. Curtis's greatest contributions to the battle of the Little Blue were to accept the risk of allowing his commanders to adapt to the situation on the battlefield and execute the delay of Price's army.

Blunt illustrated Mission Command at the intermediate command level at the Little Blue. After receiving Curtis's intent to delay Price at the Little Blue, then withdraw his forces to the Big Blue, he complied with his instructions and made necessary dispositions in order to execute that intent. Blunt utilized disciplined initiative in how he employed Moonlight in the execution of the delay along the Little Blue. He left additional forces to support Moonlight and allowed him to be more flexible in his tactical dispositions. By allowing those forces to stay, he demonstrated trust in Moonlight's judgment and understanding of the overall intent of the mission.

Blunt also assumed risk for Moonlight by taking the decision of when to withdraw up to his level. His orders to Moonlight were to contest the crossing, burn the bridge if the enemy advanced in force, and resist the enemy's advance as long as possible until he could be notified. In a sense, Blunt left his intent to Moonlight flexible, not telling him that he could not withdraw, but making that decision his responsibility. It was clear that Blunt intended to return to the Little Blue with his whole force once he had adequate opportunity to plead his case with Curtis. Blunt understood the broader end-state of Curtis's intent was to delay Price in order to both gain time for his defenses along the Big Blue, as well as allow Pleasonton time to close on Price's rear. It was for this reason that Curtis most likely approved Blunt's return to the Little Blue before hearing that a battle had begun.²⁵

Moonlight had a shared understanding of both Blunt's and Curtis's intent. After the war, Moonlight claimed that he intended to hold along the Little Blue as long as possible, regardless of the fact that his orders were to withdraw immediately upon contact.²⁶ However, it is important to note that Moonlight wrote this after the war when many veterans were writing about their experiences in an attempt to garner greater glory for their accomplishments. Essentially, he may have been trying to gain honor for the decision to fight at the Little Blue. Moonlight's actions were not as flagrant as he may have sought to take credit for after the war. However, it can be argued that the failure of the burning of the bridge necessitated additional action to slow Price's crossing of the river, which was well within the commander's intent. Furthermore, Moonlight enjoyed the trust of both of his commanders; it is notable that Curtis had suggested the task of holding the Little Blue be given to Moonlight.²⁷ If the report of the bridge not being burned alarmed Curtis, he did not believe it necessitated an immediate reaction to pull Moonlight back. Instead, Curtis simply accompanied Blunt's force to the location of the battle to assess the situation. Curtis reaction to what he witnessed upon arrival was one of praise rather than derision, stating that he expected "...to meet Moonlight in retreat. But this gallant officer stood his ground until we arrived."²⁸

Nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that Moonlight's efforts to hold Price's Army at bay were due in no small part to his exceptional tactical execution. By all expectations, Moonlight should have been crushed or easily brushed aside by so large a Confederate force. Moonlight met the larger intent of giving Curtis's army time to prepare along the Big Blue River, as well as buying time for Pleasanton to engage. Moonlight's disciplined

initiative was essential in the Union successes of 21 October, and subsequently the victory at the Battle of Westport.

All three leaders worked together, providing an excellent example of the philosophy of Mission Command in facilitating the successful delay of Price's Army. Curtis trusted his subordinates and allowed them the freedom to be adaptive and agile leaders. Blunt empowered Moonlight to be agile by assuming risk in providing him with additional forces and giving him freedom to decide how to execute tactically. Moonlight displayed outstanding disciplined initiative in taking advantage of the tactical situation in order to facilitate the Commander's intent. The synchronized efforts of all three Leaders in the chain of command enabled the success of the operation. While mistakes were made, the integration and execution of all three commanders led to achieving the overall purpose of delaying Price's army, contributing to the Union victory at the Battle of Westport.

¹ United States War Department, "General Curtis's Report, January 1865," in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (hereafter referred to as OR) (Washington, DC: Government Print Official, 1893), 41, Part 1, 479.

² United States War Department, "General Price's Report, 28 December 1864," in OR, 41, Part 1, 634.

³ Ibid., 634-635.

⁴ United States War Department, "General Shelby's Report, December 1864," in OR, 41, Part 1, 658; United States War Department, "General Thompson's Report, 24 November 1864," in OR, 41, Part 1, 666-667; Howard N. Monnett, *Action Before Westport 1864*, rev. ed. (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 1995), 79.

⁵ United States War Department, "General Pleasonton's Report, 30 November 1864," in OR, 41, Part 1, 340; United States War Department, "General Price's Report, 28 December 1864," in OR, 41, Part 1, 635.

⁶ United States War Department, “General Curtis’s Report, January 1865,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 484-485; United States War Department, “General Pleasonton’s Report, 30 November 1864,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 341; United States War Department, “General Price’s Report, 28 December 1864,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 635-636; Monnett, *Action Before Westport 1864*, 93.

⁷ United States War Department, “General Blunt’s Report, 24 December 1864,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 575-578; United States War Department, “General Shelby’s Report, December 1864,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 658.

⁸ United States War Department, “General Curtis’s Report, January 1865,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 485; United States War Department, “General Pleasonton’s Report, 30 November 1864,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 341; United States War Department, “General Price’s Report, 28 December 1864,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 636.

⁹ United States War Department, “General Curtis’s Report, January 1865,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 485-486; United States War Department, “General Shelby’s Report, December 1864,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 658; United States War Department, “General Price’s Report, 28 December 1864,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 636.

¹⁰ United States War Department, “General Pleasonton’s Report, 30 November 1864,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 341; United States War Department, “General Clark’s Report, 19 December 1864,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 684; United States War Department, “General Price’s Report, 28 December 1864,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 636; United States War Department, “Colonel Tyler’s Report, 15 December 1864,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 700; United States War Department, “General McNeil’s Report, 23 November 1864,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 372; United States War Department, “Report of General Pleasonton, 1 November 1864,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 337; Mark A. Lause, *The Collapse of Price’s Raid: The Beginning of the End in the Civil War in Missouri* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2016), 137.

¹¹ United States War Department, “General Price’s Report, 28 December 1864,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 636.

¹² United States War Department, “General Curtis’s Report, January 1865,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 491, 496-497; United States War Department, “General Price’s Report, 28 December 1864,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 637; United States War Department, “Lieutenant Colonel Benteen’s Report, 3 November 1864,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 331-333.

¹³ United States War Department, “General Curtis’s Report, January 1865,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 511, 517; United States War Department, “General Price’s Report, 28 December 1864,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 639-640.

¹⁴ United States War Department, "Major Hunt's Report, 22 November 1864," in OR, 41, Part 1, 543; Paul B. Jenkins, *The Battle of Westport* (Kansas City, MO: Franklin Hudson Publishing Co., 1906), 58.

¹⁵ George S. Grover, "The Price Campaign of 1864, George S. Grover, Captain, Foster's Cavalry Battalion, Missouri [US] Volunteers," in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War Volume 6*, ed. P. Cozzens (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 42; United States War Department, "General Curtis's Report, January 1865," OR, 41, Part 1, 487; Senator Lane's Report, 569.

¹⁶ United States War Department, "General Curtis's Report, January 1865," in OR, 41, Part 1, 478; United States War Department, "Senator Lane's Report," in OR, 41, Part 1, 569.

¹⁷ Richard J. Hinton, *Rebel Invasion of Missouri and Kansas* (Leavenworth, KS: Church and Goodman, 1865), 100.

¹⁸ Hinton, *Rebel Invasion of Missouri and Kansas*, 101.

¹⁹ United States War Department, "General Curtis's Report, January 1865," in OR, 41, Part 1, 478.

²⁰ United States War Department, "General Blunt's Report, 24 December 1864," in OR, 41, Part 1, 580.

²¹ Journal, Kansas City (1996), "Fight at the Little Blue!" in F. L. Lee, *Gettysburg of the West: The Battle of Westport*. October 22, 1864, 2.

²² James G. Blunt, "General Blunt's Account of His Civil War Experiences," *The Kansas Historical Quarterly* (May 1932): 256.

²³ Hinton, *Rebel Invasion of Missouri and Kansas*, 99.

²⁴ Blunt, "General Blunt's Account of His Civil War Experiences," 256.

²⁵ United States War Department, "General Blunt's Report, 24 December 1864," in OR, 41, Part 1, 574; Blunt, "General Blunt's Account of His Civil War Experiences," 256.

²⁶ Kip Lindberg et al., eds., "The Eagle of the 11th Kansas," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* (2003): 35.

²⁷ United States War Department, “General Curtis’s Report, January 1865,” in OR, 41, Part 1, 475.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 476.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Price's Raid of 1864 culminated at the Union victory at Westport. The Union leadership's unknowing use of the Philosophy of Mission Command at the Little Blue contributed to the decisive victory at the Battle of Westport on 23 October 1864. Not only is this an important event in the history of the Civil War in the Trans-Mississippi theater, also it provides an excellent example for the leaders of today's Army.

Mission Command as a philosophy is a relatively new leadership concept in the US Army. However, these principles have been present in combat leadership for hundreds of years. It became a part of the Army's leadership in recent years for a number of reasons but mostly due to concerns over the prevalence of micro-management in the leadership environment. The examples of Curtis, Blunt, and Moonlight's interaction, as a chain of command, are very applicable to today's military leaders as a positive example in Mission Command.

The US Army has had a tradition of strength increases in times of war, and reductions in times of peace. The Army is currently in a state of reducing its force. Emphasis on the philosophy of Mission Command is a result of experiences of Army officers during the major drawdown in the 1990s. In that environment, commanders were afraid to assume risk because the Army had become a "zero-defect" environment. "Zero defect" is essentially the philosophy that if one thing goes wrong within your command, it was your fault, therefore, a career-ending event. Some commanders became so concerned with their careers that they began to micro-manage subordinate leaders. The theory of a "zero-defect" Army seems to be most prevalent when the Army is

downsizing, and there is a perception that any negative event becomes an excuse to assist in the downsizing efforts. Micro-management and risk aversion are the very two things that the philosophy of Mission Command is attempting to avoid.

The US Army's manual ADRP 6-0, *Mission Command*, defines the Philosophy of Mission Command as the “exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders to enable disciplined initiative within the commander's intent to empower agile and adaptive leaders in the conduct of unified land operations.”¹ Within this description are the principles of Mission Command, which are supposed to guide commanders. Those principles are: build cohesive teams through mutual trust, create shared understanding, provide a clear commander's intent, exercise disciplined initiative, use of mission orders, and accept prudent risk.²

By inculcating principles of Mission Command, leaders understand the importance trust plays within a Command relationship. Trust translates into a commander's willingness to assume risk. Once a commander assumes risk, a subordinate can trust that they have freedom to act tactically within the risk level they trust their commander will accept. Commanders need to accept prudent risk to allow subordinates to execute tactically and maintain the initiative. Mission orders and intent relay the overall goals. However, commanders should provide a broad enough intent to allow subordinates the freedom to exercise initiative when they see an opportunity.

Mission Command in itself is not a new leadership philosophy but is an attempt to identify the characteristics that make up a successful leadership environment. By laying out what right looks like, the Army is attempting to reduce micro-management and risk aversion that has plagued it in recent history. The philosophy of Mission Command

outlines successful leadership traits that have demonstrated success in military actions of the past, such as the events at the Little Blue in October of 1864.

At the Little Blue we see the Union chain of command act within the philosophy and the principles of Mission Command. Curtis provided a clear intent to Blunt through orders and ensured he had a shared understanding of the greater goals of the operation. Additionally, he empowered Blunt to have the flexibility and freedom to react as the situation dictated tactically. Curtis displayed trust in Blunt by listening to him and changing his mind to allow him to return to the Little Blue. This demonstrated Curtis's ability and willingness to accept risk, as there was potential for Blunt's actions to result in his small force being cut off from the rest of the army. However, Curtis understood that Blunt's actions could lead to successful delay of the Confederate army, which was the result. Clearly, Curtis believed the reward outweighed the risk in this circumstance. Curtis's actions displayed his trust in both Blunt and Moonlight. In summary, Curtis demonstrated the qualities that a commander should in the execution of Mission Command.

Curtis provided a minor example of poor execution of Mission Command in his micromanagement of Blunt's artillery and wagon trains toward the end of the battle. By interfering with the tactical disposition of the artillery, he sowed confusion for his subordinate commanders. In addition, sending ammunition towards Independence created potentially devastating delays in resupply for Blunt's men. Luckily, these incidences were relatively minor compared to the greater overall outcome of the battle. However, it does illustrate the negative consequences of micromanagement in a tactical situation.

Blunt demonstrated Mission Command at the Little Blue. He provided clear mission orders and intent to Moonlight prior to the battle. Blunt assumed risk by allowing Moonlight to keep an entire regiment instead of the few companies he had originally intended to leave him. He demonstrated trust in Moonlight, allowing him to change his mind when it came to leaving behind a larger force. Blunt allowed Moonlight to be agile and adaptive in how he chose to execute the tactical defense along the river. Additionally, Blunt created a shared understanding with Moonlight on what the greater goals and objectives were within the campaign. Blunt had trust in Moonlight to execute within the guidance he provided, and he also trusted that Curtis would support their decisions.

Moonlight exercised disciplined initiative within his commander's intent to hold his ground and capitalize on the advantage he had in the terrain to disrupt and slow the Confederate advance. He understood that by doing so he facilitated success in the greater context of the larger campaign. Moonlight accepted prudent risk in how he defended the river. By spreading his force along the river he was vulnerable, but at the same time was able to have a better understanding of the size and crossing points of the Confederate army. Moonlight had trust in both Blunt and Curtis that whatever decisions he would make at the decisive point of engagement that they would support him. This can be an especially important factor in the psyche and confidence of a combat leader. Moonlight's ability to focus on what he would do to the enemy, rather than what his leadership's reaction to his decisions would be, can be critically important to a leader's focus.

Mission Command philosophy was successfully demonstrated by Curtis, Blunt, and Moonlight at the Battle of the Little Blue. Effective use of Mission Command as a philosophy in regard to use of mission orders, trust in subordinates, and the assumption of

prudent risk by commanders were all elements of Union success. These factors enabled the Union chain of command to employ successfully disciplined initiative, which in turn allowed them to adapt to changing situations. All of these components were critical elements of the Union leadership at the Little Blue. Curtis trusted his subordinates and assumed risk to accomplish the operation's goals. Blunt assumed risk for his subordinate to allow him tactical freedom. Moonlight felt the trust of his leadership that enabled him to act decisively with disciplined initiative to delay the Confederate advance.

The Union leadership's use of the philosophy of Mission Command at the Battle of the Little Blue River contributed to decisive victory in the 1864 Campaign. Leaders today can look at the combat execution of those leaders to understand Mission Command, and how its principles are operationally significant. This example not only presents a positive example of employing the Mission Command philosophy but also the critical moments that enabled Union success in defeating the Confederate Army in the raid of 1864, which effectively ended the Civil War in Missouri.

¹ Headquarters, Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: United States Army, September 2012), Figure 1-1, 1-3.

² Ibid., 2-1.

APPENDIX A

ORGANIZATION OF THE ARMY OF MISSOURI

Major General Sterling Price, Commanding

Fagan's Division Major General James F. Fagan

Cabell's Brigade Brigadier General William L. Cabell

Monroe's Arkansas Cavalry, Colonel James C. Monroe

Gordon's Arkansas Cavalry, Colonel Anderson Gordon

Morgan's Arkansas Cavalry, Colonel Thomas J. Morgan

Hill's Arkansas Cavalry, Colonel John F. Hill

Gunter's Arkansas Cavalry Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas M. Gunter

Harrell's Arkansas Cavalry Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel John M. Harrell

Witherspoon's Arkansas Cavalry Battalion, Major J.L. Witherspoon

Hughey's Arkansas Battery, Captain W. M. Hughey

Slemons' Brigade Colonel W.F. Slemons

2nd Arkansas Cavalry, Colonel W.F. Slemons

Crawford's Arkansas Cavalry, Colonel William A. Crawford

Carlton's Arkansas Cavalry, Charles H. Carlton

Wright's Arkansas Cavalry, Colonel John C. Wright

Dobbin's Brigade Colonel Archibald S Dobbin

Dobbin's Arkansas Cavalry, Colonel Archibald S. Dobbin

McGhee's Arkansas Cavalry, Colonel James McGhee

Witt's Arkansas Cavalry, Colonel A.R. Witt

Blocher's Arkansas Battery (one section), Lieutenant J.V. Zimmerman

McCray's Brigade Colonel Thomas H. McCray

45th Arkansas (mounted), Colonel Milton D. Baber

47th Arkansas (mounted), Colonel Lee Crandall

15th Missouri Cavalry, Colonel Timothy Reves

Unattached

Lyles' Arkansas Cavalry, Colonel Oliver P. Lyles

Rogan's Arkansas Cavalry, Colonel James W. Rogan

Anderson's Arkansas Cavalry Battalion, Captain William L. Anderson

Marmaduke's Division, Major General John S. Marmaduke

Escort- Company D, 5th Missouri Cavalry, Captain D.R. Stallard

Marmaduke's Brigade, Brigadier General John B. Clark, Jr.

3rd Missouri Cavalry, Colonel Colton Greene

4th Missouri Cavalry, Colonel John Q. Burbridge
7th Missouri Cavalry, Colonel Solomon G. Kitchen
Davies' (Missouri) Battalion Cavalry, Lieutenant Colonel J.F. Davies
8th Missouri Cavalry, Colonel William L. Jeffers
10th Missouri Cavalry, Colonel Robert R. Lawther
14th Missouri Cavalry (Battalion), Lieutenant Colonel Robert C Wood
Hynson's Texas Battery, Captain H.C. Hynson
Harris' Missouri Battery, Captain S.S. Harris
Engineer company, Captain James T. Hogane

Freeman's Brigade, Colonel Thomas R. Freeman
Freeman's Missouri Cavalry, Colonel Thomas R Freeman
Fristoe's Missouri Cavalry, Colonel Edward T. Fristoe
Ford's Arkansas Cavalry, Lieutenant Colonel Barney Ford

Shelby's Division, Brigadier General Joseph O. Shelby

Shelby's Brigade, Brigadier General M. Jeff Thompson
5th Missouri Cavalry, Colonel B. Frank Gordon
11th Missouri Cavalry, Colonel Moses W. Smith
12th Missouri Cavalry, Colonel David Shanks
Elliott's Missouri Cavalry, Colonel Benjamin Elliott
Slayback's Missouri Cavalry Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Alonzo W. Slayback
Collins' Missouri Battery, Captain Richard A Collins

Jackman's Brigade, Colonel Sidney D. Jackman
Jackman's Missouri Cavalry, Lieutenant Colonel C.H. Nichols
Hunter's Missouri Cavalry, Colonel DeWitt C. Hunter
Williams' Missouri Cavalry Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel D.A. Williams
Schnable's Missouri Cavalry Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel John A. Schnable
Collins' Missouri Battery (one section), Lieutenant Jacob D. Connor

Unattached
46th Arkansas (mounted), Colonel W.O. Coleman

Tyler's Brigade, Colonel Charles H. Tyler
Perkins' Missouri Cavalry, Colonel Caleb Perkins
Coffee's Missouri Cavalry, Colonel John T. Coffee
Searcy's Missouri Cavalry, Colonel James J. Searcy

Source: United States War Department, "Organization of Price's Army," in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC: Government Print Official, 1893) 41, Part 1, 641-642.

APPENDIX B

ORGANIZATION OF THE ARMY OF THE BORDER, DEPARTMENT OF KANSAS

Major General Samuel R. Curtis, Commanding

Curtis' Escort, Co G 11th Kansas Cavalry and Two-Gun Battery, Lieutenant Edward Gill. Major Robert H. Hunt

Provisional Cavalry Division, Major General James G. Blunt

First Brigade, Colonel Charles R. Jennison, 15th Kansas Cavalry
3rd Wisconsin Cavalry (Detachment), Captain Robert Carpenter
15th Kansas Cavalry, Lieutenant Colonel George H. Hoyt
Foster's Missouri Cavalry Battalion, Captain George S. Grover
Battery (5 guns) manned by 15th Kansas Cavalry, Lieutenant Henry L. Barker

Second Brigade, Colonel Thomas Moonlight, 11th Kansas Cavalry
5th Kansas Cavalry (Companies L and M), Captain James M. Young
11th Kansas Cavalry, Lieutenant Colonel Preston B. Plumb
16th Kansas Cavalry (Companies A and D), Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Walker
Battery (4 guns) manned by Co E, 11th Kansas Cavalry

Third Brigade, Colonel Charles W. Blair, 14th Kansas Cavalry
4th Kansas Militia, Colonel W.D. McCain
5th Kansas Militia, Colonel G.A. Colton
6th Kansas Militia, Colonel James D. Snoddy (arrested 16 October); Colonel James Montgomery
10th Kansas Militia, Colonel William Pennock
14th Kansas Cavalry, (Company E), Lieutenant William B Clark
19th Kansas Militia, Colonel A.C. Hogan
24th Kansas Militia Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel George Eaves
2nd Kansas State Artillery (2 guns), Lieutenant Daniel C. Knowles
9th Wisconsin Battery (6 guns), Captain James H. Dodge

Fourth Brigade, Colonel James H Ford, 2nd Colorado Cavalry
2nd Colorado Cavalry, Major J. Nelson Smith (killed 21 October); Major J.H. Pritchard
16th Kansas Cavalry (Detachment), Major James Ketner
McLain's Independent Colorado Battery (6 guns), Captain W.D. McLain

Kansas State Militia Division, Major General George W. Deitzler

Brigadier General M.S. Grant

Brigadier General William H.M. Fishback

Units (not brigaded)

- 1st Kansas Militia, Colonel Charles H. Robinson
- 2nd Kansas Militia, Colonel George W. Veale
- 2nd Kansas Colored Militia, Captain James L. Rafferty, Captain Richard J. Hinton
- 7th Kansas Militia, Colonel Peter McFarland
- 9th Kansas Militia, Colonel Frank M. Tracy
- 12th Kansas Militia, Colonel L.S. Treat
- 13th Kansas Militia, Colonel Alexander S. Johnson
- 14th Kansas Militia, Colonel William Gordon
- 18th Kansas Militia, Colonel Matthew Quigg
- 20th Kansas Militia, Colonel J.B. Hubbell
- 21st Kansas Militia, Colonel Sandy Lowe
- 22nd Kansas Militia, Colonel William Weer

Artillery

- Independent Colorado Battery (6 guns), Captain H. Ford Douglas
- Zesch's Battery, Kansas Militia Light Artillery (2 guns), Captain Gustavus Zesch
- Topeka Battery of 2nd Kansas Militia (1 gun), Captain Ross Burnes

Unattached Unit

- Kansas City Home Guards, Colonel Kersey Coates

Source: The Westport Historical Society. *The Battle of Westport*. Overland Park, KS: Fowler Digital Printing, 1996. Appendix II, 21-22.

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